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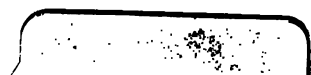
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J. W. W. W.







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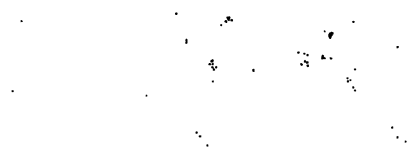
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"COMFORT YE, COMFORT YE:"

OR,

THE HARP TAKEN FROM THE WILLOWS.

BEING

**God's Words of Comfort addressed to His Church in
the last Twenty-seven Chapters of Isaiah.**

BY

J. R. MACDUFF, D.D.

*Author of "Morning and Night Watches," "Memories of Bethany,"
"Memories of Genesaret," &c. &c.*

"Comfort ye, comfort ye my people, saith your God."—ISA. xl 1.

"By the rivers of Babylon, there we sat down, yea, we wept, when we remembered Zion: We hanged our harps upon the willows in the midst thereof."—PS. cxxxvii. 1, 2.

"The Lord shall comfort Zion; He will comfort all her waste places: and He will make her wilderness like Eden, and her desert like the garden of the Lord. . . . I, even I, am He that comforteth you."—ISA. li. 3, 12.

"The Lord hath comforted His people, He hath redeemed Jerusalem."—ISA. lii. 9.

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To
THE CONGREGATIONS,
*Among whom it was the Author's privilege to minister
for twenty-eight years ;*

This Volume
is
*gratefully and affectionately
Dedicated.*

“ His music sang me of a gentler stream
That rolls for ever to a brighter shore,
Whereof our God Himself is the sole sea,
And Christ's dear love the pulsing of the tide,
And His sweet Spirit is the breathing wind.
Something it chanted, too, of exiled men
Seated in tears by that strange river, Life ;
Hanging the harp of their deep soul-desires
To rest upon the willow of the Cross,
And longing for the Everlasting hills,—
Mount Zion, and Jerusalem of God !”

— *Waters of Babylon.*

PREFATORY NOTE.

THIS volume will be found to be as much expository as practical. The Author, indeed, has made it his endeavour in most, if not in all cases, and in some very fully, to show the connection of the context with the Word or Words of Comfort, at the head of each chapter. He trusts he has thus been enabled, while dwelling on isolated passages, to preserve, so far at least, the unity and coherence of the entire Prophecy.

For much needful exegetical aid, he would acknowledge his obligations to the English translation of the German commentators Delitzsch and Hengstenberg, to Bishops Lowth and Wordsworth among

British theologians, and to Drs Barnes and Alexander of America : alterations from the rendering of the Authorised Version, which will be found in the prefixed passages, have been collated entirely from these trustworthy scholars. Be it distinctly understood, however, that such variations, after all unimportant, are given, not as disparaging the accuracy of our excellent translators, but simply because these alternative readings may be possibly suggestive of new and fresh lines of thought to the reader, as they have been to the writer.

While purposely arranged in thirty-one sections or chapters, so as to be adapted if desired for daily perusal, it has been suggested also that the volume may not be unsuitable for short Family readings on Sunday evenings.

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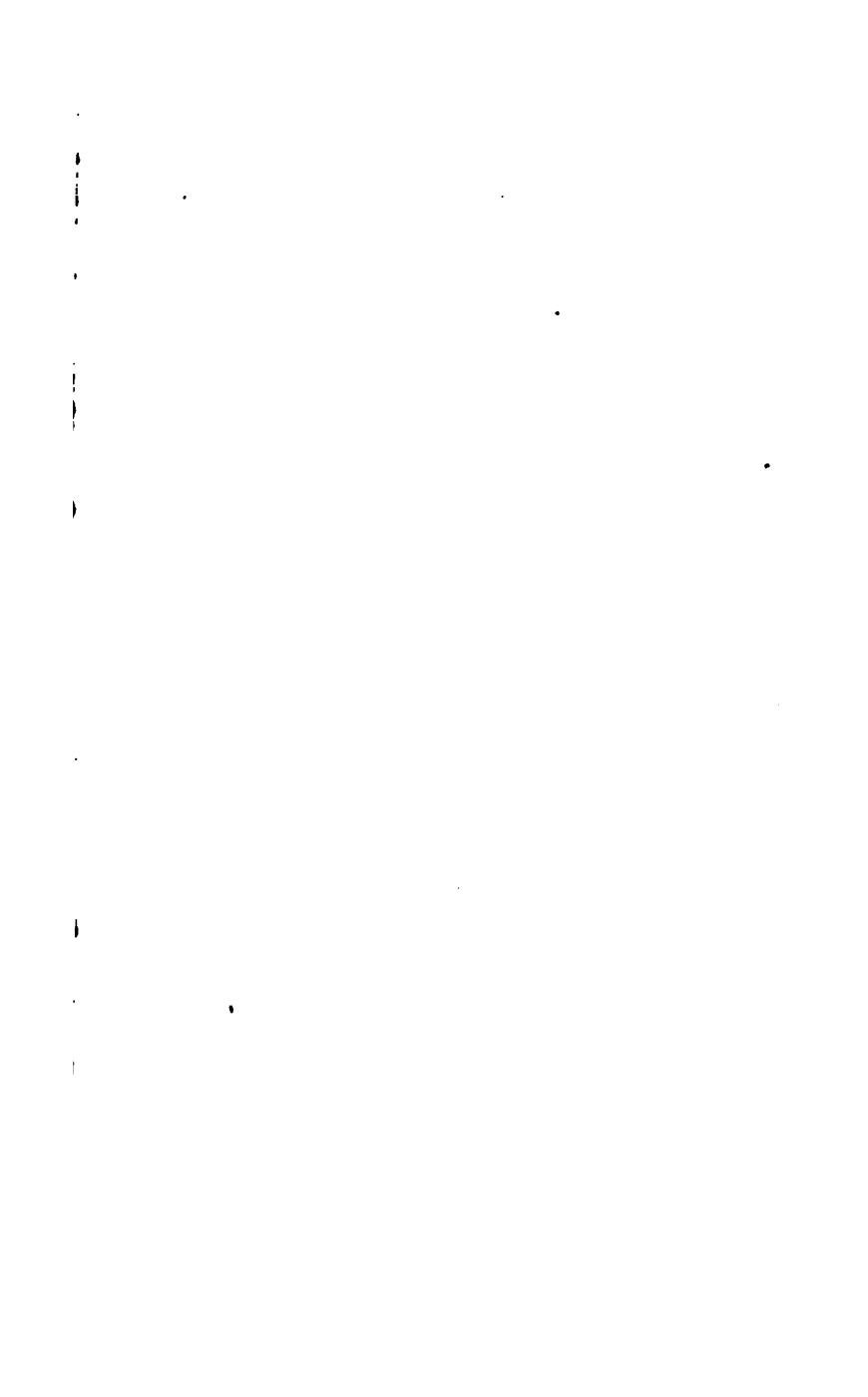
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INTRODUCTORY.



NO one can fail to be impressed with the extreme beauty of many isolated verses and passages in these sublime closing chapters of Isaiah (beginning with chap. xl.), and which are ushered in by the words taken in the following pages as a motto-verse, "COMFORT YE, COMFORT YE MY PEOPLE, SAITH YOUR GOD."

This portion of the Great Prophet's writings may well be regarded as the Old Testament Storehouse and Repertory of "exceeding great and precious promises," in which Jehovah would seem to anticipate His own special Gospel name as "the God of all comfort" (2 Cor. i. 3). The chapters themselves are

A

unique ; standing indeed so entirely apart from that which precedes, as in reality to constitute a new or separate Book,—the latest strain of Isaiah's prophetic harp, and the grandest of all prophetic strains in the sacred Canon. We feel, in perusing them, as if we had entered the most sacred *niche* in the Sanctuary of Inspired song. They have been well described as a "cycle of predictions, consisting of three portions."* The first closes with the emphatic words,—“There is no peace, saith Jehovah, unto the wicked” (chap. xlviii. 22). The second cycle, ending with chap. lvii. 21, repeats the same solemn refrain in slightly altered words,—“There is no peace, saith my God, to the wicked.” The third cycle terminates at chap. lxvi. 24. It is the same refrain, only clothed in sterner and more awful imagery,—“Their worm shall not die, neither shall their fire be quenched.” But to God's people there

* Rückert, as quoted by Delitzsch. Intr.

is another utterance and watchword. It is that of COMFORT,—“everlasting consolation, and good hope through grace.” After the wind and earthquake and fire, comes “a still small voice.” The woes and tears of the preceding prophecy had been many and varied; but now that the roll of lamentation and mourning is exhausted, the Seer, no longer girded in his ominous robe of dark haircloth (xx. 2), but clothed in “the garments of salvation” and the “robe of righteousness,” “greatly rejoicing in the Lord” (lxi. 10)—merges his mission as minister of wrath and rebuke, into that of *the Minstrel of Consolation*. The sudden prophetic doom contained in chap. xxxix., above all demanded special strains of encouragement and solace. Isaiah doubtless had longed and prayed for some such words and visions as those which follow. He may have felt that the honour of the Lord he served might otherwise be compromised in the eyes of the covenant nation. Nay, he himself

—after fifty years' pleading in vain with the obdurate nation, and with the terrible shadow of impending judgment projected on his path—could hardly fail at times to become the prey of doubt and despondency. He who had often spoken of “the *Burden* of Kingdoms,” had a heavier burden on his own heart;—the most intolerable of burdens to all earnest souls—the oppressive dread of life and of its great mission being a failure; this pathetic wail of a kindred spirit might be taken as the exponent of his anguish—“Will the Lord cast off for ever, and will He be favourable no more? Hath God forgotten to be gracious, hath He in anger shut up His tender mercies?” (Ps. lxxvii. 7, 8.) The prompt and triumphant reply comes from the lips of Jehovah Himself. It is like a gleam of light in a midnight of darkness, “*Comfort ye, comfort ye my people;*” and onwards to the close of the prophecy is only a further magnificent exposition and unfolding of this great text.

The repetition of the word—the double utterance of the “Comfort ye,” is the well-known Hebrew expression of emphasis, abundance, intensity;—“*Great* comfort, saith your God.” “With great mercies will I gather thee. In a little wrath I hid my face from thee for a moment; but with everlasting kindness will I have mercy on thee” (liv. 8). At the close of the prophecy, he tells us what the strength and abundance of that comfort is. Earth’s best picture of strong consolation is that of the mother bending over the couch of her suffering and sorrowing child; “As one,” says Jehovah, “whom his mother comforteth, so will I comfort you” (lxvi. 13). To the wicked, there is the dismal toll as of a funeral bell—“No peace! no peace!” To the believer, the joyous chime—“Comfort ye! comfort ye!” These comforts, it has been noted, come from the lips of the speaker with an almost laboured repetition:—rather, let us say, with an ever augmenting beauty and pathos. Nature is ran-

Sun of Righteousness. Cyril of Alexandria may well speak of him as "crowned, not only with prophetical grace, but with apostolic glory." With all the power of a New Testament Evangelist, he unfolds the coming of Messiah, describing alike His sufferings and His triumphs. Before his enraptured eye, the Redeemer's cross and crown and kingdom pass in succession, till he sees all nations laying their tribute-offerings at His feet,—His religion establishing a universal reign of peace, and earth becoming a second Eden. "Consolation" is his theme; but it is consolation through the great predicted Consoler,—Him who was waited for, in a later age, by Simeon and others, as "the Consolation," or Comforter "of Israel."* In a passage in one of these chapters, indeed, which we shall come in course to consider, He beautifully appropriates to Him-

* Luke ii. 25. The Greek word is *παράκλησις*. The old Wiclif translation (1380) renders it "abood the *comforte* of Israel."—*Bagster's Hexapla*.

self this very mission to a sorrow-stricken world. God, the Eternal Father, the Source of all comfort, is represented as "giving Him the tongue of the learned," and "wakening Him morning by morning" (l. 4). For what purpose He himself states in the same verse—"that I may know how to set up (or 'to COMFORT') the weary with WORDS."* The testimony of Jesus, and of Jesus as a Comforter, is truly the spirit of Isaiah's prophecy.†

* See Bishop Wordsworth's Commentary, and authorities there cited.

† It is unnecessary to do more than refer to the grounds on which we repudiate the later theory of the rational school of theology, who would deny to Isaiah the authorship of this finest portion of prophetic Scripture, and transfer it to some anonymous seer of the Captivity under the indefinite title of "the Second Isaiah." The alleged difficulty arises from the fact of Isaiah being a contemporary of Hezekiah, and thus living long anterior to the Captivity, and yet that the words of this later prophecy are expressed as if he himself were a sharer in the expatriation, personally present with the exiles, borrowing his imagery from surroundings with which he was familiar, and joining in the captives' sighs for emancipation. There seems, however, no reason why, as a prophet, he might not place himself thus, in vision, in the midst of his countrymen of a future generation, making Babylon his spiritual home, living, as it were, an ideal present, identifying himself in thought

Several of these "words of comfort" may be more peculiarly suited for the afflicted.

with the day of their bondage. Indeed, if we admit or accept such an argument against the genuineness of the Book, it would be tantamount to a denial of all prophetic inspiration. The objectors too, in the present instance, in order to preserve their consistency, would require to shift the era of their supposed prophet—"the Great Unnamed"—far beyond the close of the Babylonish Captivity, for he gives an equally realistic picture of Gospel times. He names and depicts Cyrus not more distinctly than a Greater, of whom Cyrus was the type. The awful scenes amid the Olive groves of the Kedron and Gethsemane, are as vividly portrayed as those beside the willows by the rivers of Babylon.

The same school of writers have founded another objection to the unity of Authorship, from an apparent diversity of style and diction; although scholars of equal ability and learning have successfully shown these alleged discrepancies to have been unnecessarily and unfairly exaggerated, and that (in the words of one of them) "the language of the second portion of the prophecy vouches for itself, not only by its freedom from later idioms and Chaldaisms, but also by characteristic peculiarities, to be that of Isaiah" (See *Keil in loco*.) Nor, indeed, can we see why any legitimate inference as to a divided Authorship could be drawn, even were these diversities more marked than they really are. If the latter portion of the Book is more stately and dignified,—wanting in the epigrammatic terseness and impetuosity which distinguishes the former, the difference may be thus accounted for, that while the earlier predictions were delivered orally;—and in times of great excitement, in one or more of the public places of Jerusalem before being transcribed, the latter were composed in retirement;—probably also during the evening of the Prophet's life, when

He that speaks them is "God, who comforteth those that are cast down" (2 Cor. vii. 6). But

the infirmities of declining years forbade an unequal public contest with the apostacies of a cruel and wicked reign. We necessarily therefore look, in the two, for all the difference between a spoken and a written discourse; between the abrupt, stirring, impassioned appeal of a youthful seer delivered to the throngs in the temple-court, and the calm legacy of comfort penned in mellowed age within his own dwelling, for behoof of the Church of the future.

But what, with every earnest, simple-minded Christian, must outweigh all philological and other criticism, our blessed Lord Himself, and His inspired Apostles, credit none other than ISAIAH with the Authorship of these later chapters. The Divine Redeemer, in inaugurating His own public ministry in the Synagogue of Nazareth, opened and read from this very portion of "*the Book of Esaias the prophet*" (Luke iv. 17). And again, it was the same portion of the same Divine Oracle which engaged the absorbed meditation of the Ethiopian Eunuch—the "anxious inquirer" in the desert of Gaza,—for when Philip met him "he was returning, and sitting in his chariot read *Esaias the prophet*" (Acts viii. 28). [See also Matt. iii. 1-3; Luke iii. 4; John i. 23.]

The following are the closing words of an able writer in a discriminating dissertation. They express our own settled convictions. "We can find no difficulty in recognising in the second part the presence of the same plastic genius as we discover in the first. Altogether the æsthetic criticism of all the different parts of the book bring us to the conclusion, . . . that the whole originated in one mind, and that mind one of the most sublime and variously gifted instruments which the Spirit of God has ever employed to pour forth its voice upon the world." Smith's Bible Dic., Art. *Isaiah*.

they are by no means restricted to such. They speak a language which has a response in every human heart that has been brought face to face with the great problems of life and death—the soul and immortality.

Let us then, with earnest prayer for the teaching of the divine Spirit, open this noble Gospel of consolation for the Church collectively, and for believers individually; thus befittingly heralded by the blast of the Silver Trumpet—the trumpet of Jubilee, “COMFORT YE! COMFORT YE!”

“Blessed are the people that know the joyful sound.”

"Comfort ye, comfort ye my people, saith your God.
Speak ye comforting words to Jerusalem, and cry unto her;
That her warfare is ended, that the expiation of her iniquity is
accepted (*Lowth*),
That she hath received from the hand of JEHOVAH double for all
her sins.

Hark! a voice crying in the wilderness,
'Clear the way of JEHOVAH!
Make level in the desert a highway for our God.'

And the glory of JEHOVAH shall be manifested,
And all nations shall see together the salvation of our God
For the mouth of JEHOVAH hath spoken. [*(Lowth)*,

Hark! a voice saying 'Cry,'
And I answered, 'What shall I cry?'

'All flesh is grass
And all its beauty like a flower of the field.'

Upon a high mountain get thee up, O Zion, bringer of good
tidings (or Evangelistess Zion) [*Delitzsch*];

Exalt thy voice with strength, Jerusalem, bringer of good tidings;
Exalt it, be not afraid,

Say to the cities of Judah 'Behold your God!'

*Behold the Lord JEHOVAH! as a mighty one will He come,
His arm ruling for Himself;*

*Behold His reward is with Him, and the recompense of His work
before Him.*

Like a Shepherd shall He feed His flock,

In His arm shall He gather up the lambs

*And shall bear them in His bosom: the nursing ewes shall He
gently lead" (Marginal).*

—ISAIAH XL I-II.

I.

**“Comfort ye, comfort ye my people,
saith your God.”**

“Behold, the Lord God will come with strong hand, and his arm shall rule for him : behold, his reward is with him, and his work before him. He shall feed his flock like a shepherd : he shall gather the lambs with his arm, and carry them in his bosom, and shall gently lead those that are with young.”

—ISAIAH XL, 10, 11.

Power WHILE the prefatory utterance
and “COMFORT YE, COMFORT YE,” forms
Tenderness. the key-note to the great Prophecy of Consolation which follows, there is a further prologue, or introduction to the Book, extending from the 1st to the 11th verse inclusive, and which contains in brief, what is amplified in the subsequent twenty-seven chapters. The beauty and peculiarity of the closing words of the introduction (which we have selected as

our first theme), consists in the combination of the might of ADONAI JEHOVAH (ver. 10), with the gentleness of the Shepherd, carrying in His bosom the weak and weary of the flock (ver. 11). Ere the prophetic roll is unfolded, the aged seer would seem desirous to announce, in a preliminary sentence, the characteristics of the Divine Being who had selected him as His minister of comfort:—he would himself anticipate the mission and message immediately after given to another, and say to the cities of Judah (to the Church of Christ until the end of time), “Behold your God!”

Let us first of all, however, trace the connection of the verses with the other words of inauguration of which they form a part.

The opening scene of the inspired drama, if it may be so expressed, lies in a wilderness. In that wilderness there had been heard a precursive note as of a herald’s or harbinger’s trumpet, announcing a new and more glorious

manifestation of Jehovah's presence to His Church as her Deliverer and King,—“Prepare ye the way of the Lord, make straight in the desert a highway for OUR GOD!” (ver. 3). The Prophet standing on his distant watch-tower waits for further disclosures. His suspense, ere long, is relieved. A new voice (not “*the* voice” as in our version, but another—anonymous—probably divine) breaks the trance of that still hour and scene—“A voice said, ‘Cry,’ and he said, ‘What shall I cry?’—‘All flesh is grass, and all the goodness thereof is as the flower of the field” (ver. 6). To the Seer, this utterance had its sad interpretation and fulfilment in the wreck and ruin of his beloved Jerusalem; in her Temple being rased to the ground, her holy cities turned into a wilderness, and all her pleasant things laid waste; or as she herself is afterwards depicted, under another figure, as a widow, sitting in sackcloth and ashes, weeping for her children in distant Babylon, and refusing to be comforted, because they are not. He

speaks (in ver. 2) of her "warfare," a word which, in the original, refers to the hard and toilsome service of the soldier keeping bivouac in the unsheltered tenting-ground of an alien land (*Delitzsch*). But God's servants are commissioned to "speak comfortably to her" [lit. "speak to her heart"], telling her that the struggle is over, that the war-tents may be struck, for the Lord's controversy with her is finished. The plaint of her captive thousands has been answered—"Turn again our captivity, O Lord, as streams in the south!" In emphatic contrast with all that human transitoriness—the wreck and revolution of kingdoms—the fading and withering of the grass—was the stability and unchangeableness of the Divine Word. The tide of human affairs was shifting and capricious, but the Rock was enduring;—"The Word of our God shall stand for ever" (v. 8).

Zion—mourning Zion listens to the message of consolation. Like the Israelitish matrons and damsels who in the olden days of chivalry

went forth with timbrel and harp on occasions of triumph, she is represented, at the bidding of the same divine voice, rising from her couch of ashes, and as an Evangelist ("Evangelistess") ascending the mountain-heights of her forsaken land, proclaiming far and wide the gladsome news of the return of the exiles, and the rebuilding of her waste-places. We may follow her joyous footsteps, first up her own sacred summits, then up the adjoining steep slopes of Moriah and the slopes of Olivet; thence we may imagine her speeding, in this angel-flight, to the heights of Mizpeh, the old tribal gathering-place; thence to Bethel, the first mountain sanctuary; onwards to Bethhaccerem, the beacon-hill of her wilderness border; onwards still, till she completes the circuit amid the mountains of Bether. Nor are the eminences within the territories of the two restored tribes alone to listen to her shout of jubilee. Descending to the plains, she speeds her way from city to city, and from

hamlet to hamlet; and "lifting up her voice with strength," wakes their slumbering echoes with the cry, "BEHOLD YOUR GOD!" (v. 9).^{*} In a more beautiful sense still, was Jerusalem the Evangelist of glad news, at the coming of her Messiah-King. A commentator has remarked, that the word here twice used, and rendered "that bringest good tidings," has reference to "a good thing made *manifest*,—displayed to the bodily eye." How true was this in the case of her Great Incarnate Lord, "the Image of the Invisible God,"—"the glory of the only-begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth!" Jerusalem, the metropolis of the Church and the Mother of cities, bore, first throughout her own sacred territory, and then to the nations of the earth, this message

^{*} "Comfort ye, comfort ye, . . . Speak ye comfortably to JERUSALEM." A personal reference and coincidence may here be forgiven. In a pocket Bible used in Palestine, these verses, and the chapter of which they form a part, are marked as being read together at tent-worship on the occasion of our first Sabbath in Jerusalem.


of glad tidings—"Great is the mystery of godliness, God was *manifest* in the flesh."* Nor has the mission of this queenly Evangelist ceased. Wherever and whenever the daughters of Jerusalem—her children scattered over the face of the earth—are out in the cold bivouac—the night-watch of sin and sorrow, amid loneliest experiences of desolation—it is the privilege of the Church, pointing to Him who once came in humiliation, and who is to come the second time in glory, to lift up her voice with the watchword, "BEHOLD YOUR GOD!"

What that brief utterance comprehends, is expanded in the two verses which follow.

I. "BEHOLD YOUR GOD," *full of might and majesty* (v. 10). "Behold" (as the words may be rendered) "the Lord God" (the ADONAI JEHOVAH—the divine incommunicable Name) as a Mighty one is He coming (or in the person of a Strong one), "and His arm" (the

* See Bishop Wordsworth on the passage.

invariable symbol of power) "shall rule for Him." To Christ all power has been committed. He is "the arm of God" (li. 9), "the man of Jehovah's right hand, the Son of Man whom He has made *strong* for Himself" (Ps. lxxx. 17):—His name is "Immanuel, God with us." He is represented here, too, coming as a Victor, bearing the spoils of the vanquished. "Leading captive multitudes captive," He has "received gifts for men, yea, for the rebellious also." Seeing of the fruit of the travail of His own soul, He is satisfied. "Behold His reward (His reward for His ransomed people) is with Him, and the recompense of His work before Him." He Himself—when the last echoes of Inspiration are dying away—repeats to His Church the very note here sounded by the matron city—"Behold I come quickly! *and my reward is with me*" (Rev. xxii. 12). Blessed are they who, at that Great Advent, will be ready with the response to Zion—"Lo, this is *our God*, we have waited for Him."



II. But, side by side with the assurance of Messiah's *might*, there is a glorious complementary and counterpart truth. He combines with the power of the victorious King, *the gentleness of the tender and loving Shepherd*. "He shall *feed* His flock." That word is a comprehensive one. It means that He shall act all the part of a shepherd towards them; leading them, protecting them, providing alike the green pastures and the still waters, seeking them out in the dark and cloudy day, rescuing them from the thorny brake, defending them from the beasts of prey, bearing them, if need be, through the swellings of the river or "the Valley of Death-shade," and folding them at eventide. Nay, as if this were not enough. He is beautifully represented as "gathering the lambs in His arms;"—making a pillow for them in the folds of the loose "*abbêh*," or shepherd's mantle, as they nestle close in His bosom. And while thus He deals with the tender lambs, He is equally merciful and

considerate not to overdrive their nursing mothers (for that is the reference in the original):* “He gently leads” those who have their young ones by their side, and who cannot keep pace with those that are stronger. He, the true “Prince who has power with God and with men, and has prevailed,” can say in the words of Jacob at the brook Jabbok,—“My Lord knoweth that the children are tender, and the flocks and herds giving suck to their young are with me; and if the shepherds should overdrive them one day, all the flock will die” (Gen. xxxiii. 13). What is this, but by the most beautiful and (to a Hebrew) the most impressive of emblems, to tell of the exquisitely tender and merciful dealings of this Shepherd-Saviour to the weakest, feeblest of His people: adapting Himself to their wants and trials, their exigencies, and doubts, and perplexities;—the

* See marginal reading, vindicated by Lowth, Bochart, and others.

tender lambs or the nursing ewes;—the truant entangled amongst briars;—the wanderer foot-sore with travel;—He has a place in His regards for one and all. Such gracious dealing gives joy and gladness to His own exalted nature, “Behold His reward is with Him!” For may not this be the prophetic, forestalled interpretation of His own beautiful Gospel parable—the lost sheep borne home from its wanderings by the Good Shepherd,—when “He layeth it on His shoulders rejoicing.” His reward is with Him; “Rejoice with me,” He says, “for I have found my sheep which was lost” (Luke xv. 6).

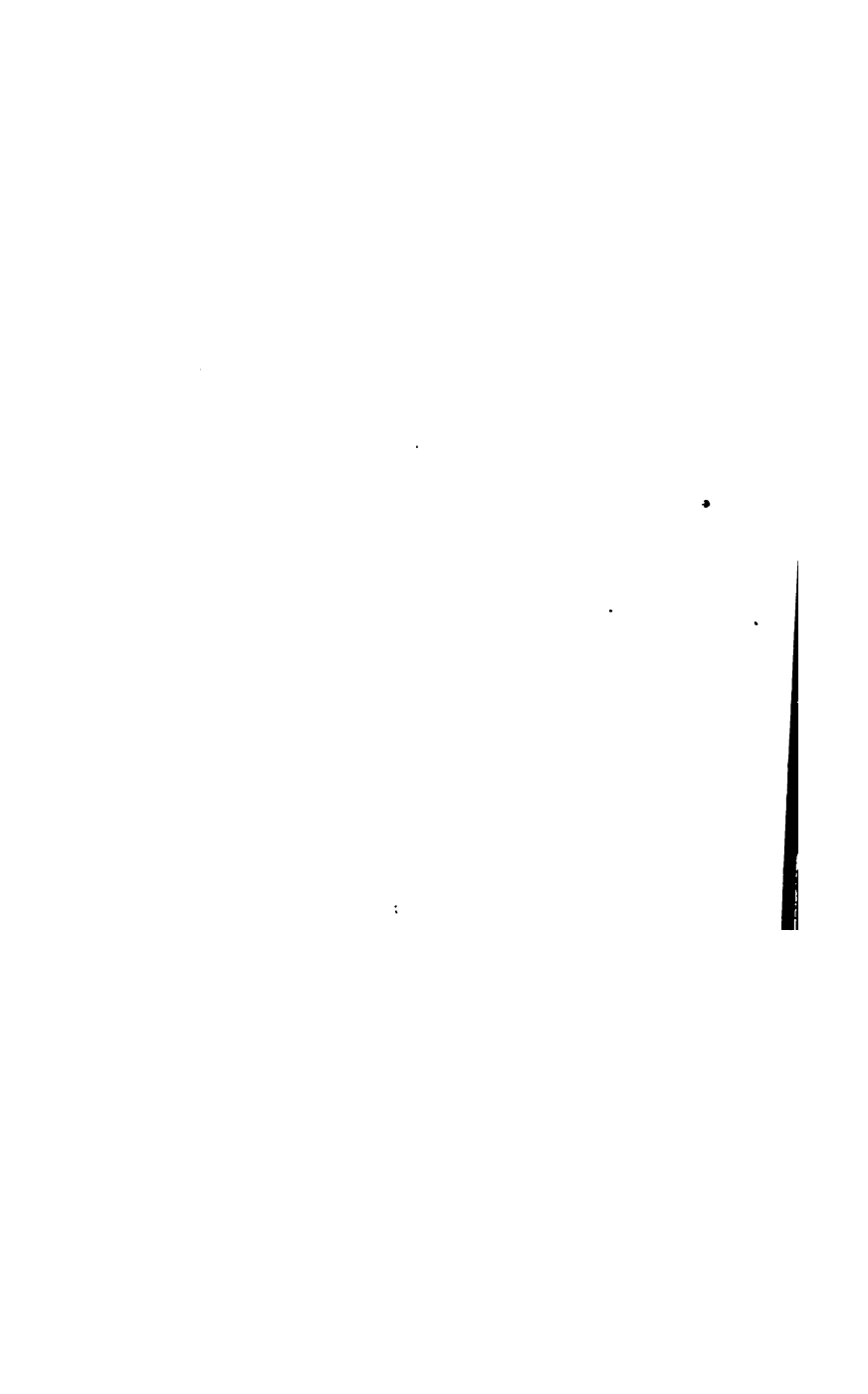
Believer! exult in this twofold word of comfort, “Rejoice, O daughter of Zion: behold thy *King* cometh, *meek* and *lowly*.” Behold your God! Behold your Shepherd! strong to smite, strong to save. The striking combination recalls a later parallel picture and prophecy of Zechariah, where, of the same Messiah-Saviour who is spoken of as Jehovah’s

Shepherd and fellow, it is said, "And He shall turn His hand upon the little ones" (Zech. xiii. 7). What a union of majesty and love! the mighty Cedar of God with its top reaching to heaven, yet the feeblest bird can find a perch amid the thick branches, and fold its wings to sleep. My God! yet my Brother! "Thy kingdom is an everlasting kingdom, and Thy dominion endureth throughout all generations, —(yet) the Lord upholdeth all that fall, and raiseth up all those that be bowed down."

"God of all might. Responsive to His call
Obedient planets wheel their course on high :
Yet, with fond care, He notes the sparrow's fall,
And feeds the raven's young ones when they cry.

Thou Gracious Shepherd ! shield Thy flock from harm,
Cheer and sustain each trembling one with this—
That while Omnipotence is in Thine arm,
Thou hast a Brother's heart for tenderness."

"IN THE MULTITUDE OF MY THOUGHTS WITHIN ME
THY COMFORTS DELIGHT MY SOUL."



"LIFT up your eyes on high,
 And see who hath created these.
 He leadeth forth their armies by number ;
 He calleth them all by name,
 Through the greatness of His strength and the mightiness
 of His power (*Lowth*) ;
 There is not one that is missing.
Why sayest thou then, O Jacob,
And why speakest thou thus, O Israel,
'Hidden is my way from JEHOVAH,
And by my God my cause is passed by.'
Hast thou not known, hast thou not heard,
That JEHOVAH—the God of Eternity,
Creator of the ends of the earth,
Fainteth not, nor becomes wearied ;
His understanding is unsearchable.
 He giveth strength to the faint ;
 To the powerless, might will He increase.
 And weary shall youths be and faint,
 And the chosen youths shall be weakened, be weakened
 (*Alexander*).
 But those, waiting for JEHOVAH, shall gain new strength ;
 They shall mount up with wings like eagles,
 They shall run and not be wearied,
 They shall go onward and not faint."

—ISAIAH xl. 26, 27, 28.

II.

“ Comfort ye, comfort ye my people,
saith your God.”

“ Why sayest thou, O Jacob, and speakest, O Israel, My way is hid from the Lord, and my judgment is passed over from my God? Hast thou not known, hast thou not heard, that the everlasting God, the Lord, the Creator of the ends of the earth, fainteth not, neither is weary? there is no searching of His understanding.”

—ISAIAH xl. 27, 28.

NOTHING can be finer in any poetry, Unbelief sacred or profane, than the verses Rebuked. preceding those which have just been quoted. In them, the Prophet utters, in the name of his God, a series of sublime challenges and protests against the blasphemous assumption of the Chaldeans, who claimed for their idol-deities supremacy over the Jehovah of the Hebrews. Ver. 12, “Who” (among your gods

of gold and silver, brass, iron, wood, and stone—Dan. v. 4) “hath measured the waters in the hollow of his hand, and meted out heaven with the span, and comprehended the dust of the earth in a measure, and weighed the mountains in scales, and the hills in a balance?” He describes (ver. 15) the relation of Jehovah to the nations—“Behold, the nations are as a drop of a bucket” (like the drop falling from the outside of the bucket in drawing water), “and are counted as the small dust of the balance: behold, He taketh up the isles as a very little thing,” (or “as an atom,” a grain of fine dust). Nor can earth furnish the altar or offering befitting His divine majesty. The Seer illustrates this by a magnificent figure, which could not fail to be familiar to the imagination of his countrymen. From the comparatively lowly eminences of Palestine, the eye of the Hebrew often wandered, in the hazy distance, among the heights of Lebanon, with its shaggy forests of cedar and the herds which roamed their glades, from the

timid gazelle to the lordly lion and leopard. "Make," says he, "the world your Temple; take that Lebanon for your altar; hew down its vast groves in order that the aggregate may form a gigantic sacrificial pile: gather together for the oblation every animal which has a lair in its thickets—all, all would be insufficient;—" And Lebanon is not sufficient to burn, nor the beasts thereof sufficient for a burnt-offering" (ver. 16). If possible in a nobler and grander figure of speech still, he tells them (ver. 26) to lift up their eyes to the bright heavens of their own covenant land, gleaming with innumerable stars, (that same glorious map which the same Divine Instructor had, centuries before, unrolled to the gaze of Father Abraham). He describes Jehovah as marshalling these heavenly hosts, "those children of light in armour of light" (*Delitzsch*), like a mighty army, rank on rank. So searching is His omniscience, that He knows them all by name; and at the roll-call of the glittering hosts not one is missing,—not one in the martial array

dare fall out of the ranks or leave a vacant place at the muster:—"not one faileth" ('not one of them faileth to appear'—*Lowth.* Compare Ps. cxlvii. 4). Or, if we give yet an alternative meaning to the figure, and take it to represent God as the Shepherd of the universe, and the stars in the midnight sky as His vast flock scattered over the meadows of heaven;—like the Oriental shepherd, He has a name for every member of His fold in these tracks of immensity; not one is unwatched and untended by their great Creator and Almighty Keeper. The description of God's power can go no further than this. Then comes the rebuke and remonstrance towards which all this magnificent prologue tended:—"If such be thy God, O afflicted soul, where is there room for misgiving and despair?"

Yet have His people in every age of the world, like the captive Jews in Babylon, been tempted at times to give way to doubt and despondency. The words before us contain the feelings of such embodied in utterance. They imagine that they

are God-forsaken, given over to desertion and abandonment. In this sorest agony of the bereft spirit, their plaintive soliloquy is (ver. 27), "My way is hid from the Lord, and my judgment" (or my cause) "passeth unregarded by my God" (*Lowth*). Who amongst us have not at times given way to such unworthy distrust of the equity and righteousness of the divine dealings? In the deep mysteries of daily providence—the apparently cross purposes in our lives—have we not been led to ask, Where are the footsteps of a God of love here? This prop of my earthly hopes and existence removed! This quickener of my spiritual being, gone to sepulchral silence! Or is it the growth and fearful proportion of evil in the world; the oppression of virtue, and the prospering of vice? Or is it the promised dawn of millennial times apparently as distant as ever—no ray in the eastern sky—darkness still covering the lands, and gross darkness the people:—mission schemes thwarted and baffled, and noble-hearted men

left on the field of unrecompensed labour, to cry in disconsolate sorrow and despair, "Lord, how long!" Has the God of high heaven abdicated His throne? Is He, like Baal, asleep? Has He gone on a long journey, and left His world to anarchy and misrule? No! no! "COMFORT YE! COMFORT YE MY PEOPLE, SAITH YOUR GOD." "Why sayest thou thus," He asks, "O Jacob" (the covenant name), "why speakest thou thus, O Israel" (a title more honourable and illustrious still, for it reminded of victory by "the soldier of God"—Gen. xxxii. 28):—Why, O Jacob, O Israel, ye who have tasted my covenant mercies—my chosen ones, my adopted children, why harbour unworthy surmises as to my fidelity to my promises? If such be my care and supervision of these distant stars; if I have each one of them counted and named; if I "bind the sweet influences of the Pleiades, loose the bands of Orion, and guide Arcturus with his sons"—how can ye, my own body-guard ("soldiers of Jehovah")—how can ye suppose

that ye are unbefriended and unsuccoured ; left as wandering planets, to drift away in uncontrolled eccentric orbits ; or, as wandering sheep, unwatched and untended by the Shepherd who gave His life for you ? As every star in these mighty galaxies has its appointed pathway, and walks the firmament in obedience to divine and determinate law, each maintaining its appropriated place, and obeying its time of revolution ; so have I in my hands, and under my control, the interests of you my people. Other props may fail and deceive you, but "the Everlasting God ("the God of Eternity"), Jehovah, the Creator of the ends of the earth, fainteth not, neither is weary. He giveth power to the faint, and to them that have no might He increaseth strength" (vers. 28, 29). Man often faints and is weary. As it is here said (ver. 27), even the "chosen youths" and "young men,"—types of strength and endurance (the reference probably being to the flower of the people chosen for military service), shall utterly fall, (lit. "become

weakened, weakened"). From the very imperfection of our nature, we are subject to ebb and flow, the creatures of impulse and passion and caprice. Not so God. There are no intromissions in His faithfulness,—no fluctuations; "with whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning" (James i. 17).

And "hast thou not known this, hast thou not heard this?" It is not a faithfulness that is untried, untested, unproved. What is the Bible but a long and glorious record of the divine dealings, a justification of the ways of God to man, even when these ways at the time seemed inconsistent with love and wisdom and mercy. "If the Lord be with us, why then is all this befallen us?" (Jud. vi. 13). "Hath the Lord forgotten to be gracious?" (Ps. lxxvii. 9). "Lord, if Thou hadst been here, my brother had not died" (John xi. 21). These are some of the wailings from the lips of the Little-faiths and Ready-to-halts and Despondencies of sacred story. In all cases, the results showed how

ungenerous and unreasonable were their unbelieving doubts.

“*Wait on the Lord*” is the closing exhortation—the sovereign balm for this wounded spirit—the antidote to all this base and unworthy fear. Trust Him in the dark; honour Him with unwavering confidence even in the midst of mysterious dispensations; and the recompense of such faith will be like the moulting of the eagles’ plumes, which was said to give them a new lease of youth and strength. It was a Rabbinical legend that the eagle, every tenth year, soared so near the sun as to be scorched by the heat,—that with wings collapsed it fell into the sea, emerging from the deep with new plumage (*Alexander*). So shall it be with God’s faithful children. “They that trust in Jehovah shall gather new strength; they shall mount up with wings as eagles” (or, “they shall put forth fresh feathers like the moulting eagle”—*Lowth*); “they shall run and not be weary, they shall walk and not faint.” “Why sayest thou then, O

Jacob, why speakest thou thus, O Israel?" Hush these atheist surmises. Let these dead thoughts bury their dead. Wait on the Lord ; and He who "reneweth thy youth like the eagle's," will give wings to drooping faith, and courage to desponding hearts. Up! ye Israelites, ye soldiers of God! trust Him who is here said to give strength to the fainting. He, the Great Shepherd, has a personal and discriminating knowledge of each member of His fold. He who names the stars as they walk the fields of night, has an equal care and cognisance of His covenant people. "O Jacob! O Israel!" He says, "fear not, for I have redeemed thee; I have called thee by thy *name*; thou art mine." "Wait on the Lord, be of good courage, and He shall strengthen thine heart; wait, I say, on the Lord." Even should it be by the Bethesda pool of affliction, "wait,"—wait on for the angel's coming: "For the vision is yet for an appointed time, but at the end it shall speak and not lie. Though it tarry, wait for it; because it will surely

come, it will not tarry." "The Lord is good to them that wait for Him, unto the soul that seeketh Him."

"Still we study, always failing !
God can read it, we must *wait* ;
Wait, until He teach the mystery,
Then the wisdom-woven history
Faith shall read and love translate.

Leaflets now unpag'd and scattered
Time's great library receives ;
When Eternity shall bind them,
Golden volumes we shall find them,
God's light falling on the leaves."

"The weary, waiting times
Are but the muffled peals,
Low preluding celestial chimes,
That hail His chariot wheels.

Soon shall the morning gild
The dark horizon rim,
Thy heart's desire shall be fulfilled,
Wait patiently for Him."

"IN THE MULTITUDE OF MY THOUGHTS WITHIN ME
THY COMFORTS DELIGHT MY SOUL."

'But thou, Israel, my Servant,
 Thou Jacob whom I have chosen,
 The seed of Abraham my friend :
 Thou whom I have led by the hand from the ends of the earth
 And from the corners thereof have called thee, (Lowth),
 And said unto thee, My Servant art thou ;
 I have chosen thee, and not rejected thee.
Fear thou not ; for I am with thee :
Look not around (in dismay) ; for I am thy God (Alexander) :
I will strengthen thee ; yea, I will help thee ;
Yea, I will support thee with my faithful right hand (Barnes).

For I JEHOVAH thy God hold thee fast by thy right hand ;
 He who saith to thee, ' Fear not, I am thy helper.'
 ' Fear not, thou worm Jacob and handful Israel (Delitzsch),
 I am thy helper,' saith JEHOVAH,
 ' And thy Redeemer is the Holy One of Israel.'
 Behold, I have made thee a threshing roller,
 Sharp, new, armed with double teeth,
 ' Thou shalt thresh the mountains, and beat them small,
 And hills like the chaff shalt thou make.'
 ' Thou shalt winnow them, and the wind carry them away,
 And the tempest scatter them abroad ;
 And thou shalt rejoice in JEHOVAH,
 In the Holy One of Israel shalt thou glory.' "

—ISAIAH xli. 8-16.

III.

**“Comfort ye, comfort ye my people,
saith your God.”**

“Fear thou not ; for I am with thee : be not dismayed ; for I am thy God : I will strengthen thee ; yea, I will help thee ; yea, I will uphold thee with the right hand of my righteousness. Fear not, thou worm Jacob, and ye men of Israel ; I will help thee, saith the Lord, and thy Redeemer, the Holy One of Israel. . . . Thou shalt thresh the mountains, and beat them small, and shalt make the hills as chaff. . . . And thou shalt rejoice in the Lord, and shalt glory in the Holy One of Israel.”

—ISAIAH xli. 10, 14-16.

The Weak IN the previous exposition, we found
Strength- God, by the mouth of His prophet,
ened. exposing the vanity and worthlessness of idolatry. He now summons the votaries themselves to an argument or debate, in the midst of which He unfolds to His own Israel specific tidings of a coming Deliverer.

As the august tribunal is about to be set,

“the Islands” (a poetic name for the heathen world) are invited to be spectators and auditors of the controversy. Jehovah Himself delivers the summons:—“Keep silence before me, O islands, and let the nations renew their strength” (ver. 1). It is like an echo of the Prophet’s last utterance. *My* people have ‘renewed *their* strength,’ and mounted up on eagles’ wings; let the heathen—idol-worshipping nations—renew *theirs*, if they can! (*Wordsw.*) “Let them come near; let them speak; let us enter into solemn debate together” (ver. 1). The figure here introduced is one with which we are familiar in the inspired writings; when dumb nature is sisted as arbiter and umpire in God’s controversy with His creatures (Isa. i. 2; Micah vi. 2, 3). The world is made a Carmel, where, by divine appeal, the question is to be decided, “Baal or God?”—a speechless idol or a living Jehovah?

In ver. 2, God commences the challenge. He makes the proof and vindication of His sovereignty to turn on the prophetic announce-

ment of the great conqueror who was to deliver captive Israel from the grasp of the most potent nation then in the world. "Who raised up" (or awakened) "the righteous man* from the East—called him to his foot" (the Hebrew expression for servitude or vassalage), "subdued nations at his presence, and gave him dominion over kings? He gave them as dust to his sword, and as driven stubble to his bow. He pursued them, and passed in safety, even by a way never before trodden with his feet. Who hath performed and done these things?" (ver. 2-4). Is it Cyrus? this hero-prince from the land of the sun-rising, with his mailed legions, whose name carried terror among the nations? It is a Greater far. He was but the viceroy of the King of kings. It is one Mightier than the mightiest. He who "callesh the

* Cyrus, "the righteous man," or minister of God's "righteousness," was one to whose noble nature the term Just or Righteous might, among the other tyrants of the world, be exceptionally applied.

generations of men from the beginning; I Jehovah, the first, and with the last; I am He!" (ver. 4).

The nations listen to God's challenge. They are mute. They give no response, as He claims to Himself the sole glory of the deliverer and the deliverance. We may imagine a momentary pause; but it is only to introduce a new scene in the sacred drama.

Among these Islands—these nations—there is stir and consternation. They have seen the wondrous interposition—they have seen "Bel bowing low, and Nebo stooping" (xlvi. 1)—Babylon the great has fallen;—Cyrus, God's predicted viceroy and minister, has conquered, and His people are free! What are they to do? Are they to look on, unconcerned spectators, on this second Hebrew exodus, and, without a struggle or remonstrance, to acknowledge the supremacy of the Hebrew Jehovah?

No! the aid of their idols and tutelary deities must in the crisis-hour be invoked, and their

wrath propitiated. Accordingly, like the sailors of Jonah's vessel in the midst of the storm, "every man cried unto his god."

Vers. 5, 6, "The Isles" (the maritime countries) "saw," (saw the victorious march of Cyrus) "and feared; the remotest parts of the earth trembled and were terrified—they drew near; they came together; they helped every one his neighbour." Hostile and divided nations forgot their mutual jealousies and hates, that they might be confederate on an occasion like this, when their altars as well as their thrones were in peril. Their policy, priestcraft, and credulity are graphically described. A vivid picture is given of the desperate efforts which superstition makes in a moment of common terror; the eagerness with which the varied artificers hastened forward the fabrication of the dumb idol—the idol itself thus dependent on the most trivial efforts of handicraft. Ver. 6, "Every one said to his brother" (stimulating him), "Be of good courage; so the carver" (the artificer in

metal or wood) "encouraged the smith, the hammer-smoother encouraged him that smiteth on the anvil, saying of the soldering, 'It is good,' and he made the idol firm with nails that it should not move." It is a repetition of the sarcasm of ver. 20 in previous chapter,—“He made the idol fast, that it should not ‘rock’ or ‘shake’ on its pedestal.” What a true delineation, we may remark in passing, does the wild excitement of these terror-struck nations give of the consternation which seizes sinners still in the hour of appalling judgment, imminent peril, impending death! However the verities of the spiritual world may be despised and scouted on ordinary occasions; in the day of calamity—at the crash of the ship on the sunken rock—or at the cry of fire in the midnight sea—or when dear life is “balanced in a breath” amid the ravings of fever—then atheism, the bold, defiant atheism dominant at other times, takes wings. Prayerless knees are then bent, which were never bent before, on the vessel’s deck, or at the

fevered bedside, and a living God is invoked for help and mercy. Realities, previously undreamt of, confront face to face, and extort from the stricken conscience the wail of anguish and despair,—“What then shall I do when God riseth up? and when He visiteth, what shall I answer Him?” (Job xxxi. 14.)

But to return. Ver. 8, Jehovah has waited on the summoned nations for an answer to His challenge. There being, however, no reply, He delivers, in the verses which head this exposition, an address to Israel, His own covenant people, giving the assurance of protection and safety, in words, “every one of which breathe the deepest affection” (*Delitzsch*), and which are intended for the comfort of His Church in every age. Ver. 8, “But thou, Israel, my servant, Jacob whom I have chosen, the seed of Abraham my friend, fear thou not; for I am with thee: be not dismayed; for I am thy God: I will strengthen thee; yea, I will help thee; yea, I will uphold thee with my faithful

right hand." "Strengthen," "help," "uphold," a trinity of divine forces, a triple wall of divine protection:—"If God be for us, who can be against us?" At ver. 13 the same assurances are reiterated, only adding a more tender and expressive description of Israel's feebleness and helplessness, in contrast with His own willingness and ability to save. "Worm Jacob" He calls them in their exile; like a worm, down-trodden, impotent to evade the cruel heel of the conqueror, trampled in the dust of degradation. He adds, ver. 14, "Ye men of Israel;"—or as that has rather been rendered, "Ye handful Israel"—or as Luther translates it, "Ye poor crowd of Israel." The idea is, a handful of abandoned captives (like our own of Indian or Abyssinian memory) cooped up in their Babylonian prison-house, in abject helplessness and despair; their old glory as the undismembered covenant nation—"the seed of Abraham," gone, apparently for ever. "Fear not, thou worm Jacob, and ye poor crowd of Israel; I will

help thee, saith the Lord thy REDEEMER, the Holy One of Israel."

It is the first time we have met with the name "Redeemer" in these chapters. It is the Hebrew word "*Goël*,"—the same as that which had been used by the patriarch Job ages before, when he uttered, as the opening article of a gospel creed, "I know that my '*Goël*,' (my Redeemer) liveth" (Job xix. 25). "It would suggest to a Hebrew reader the ideas of a near kinsman (Lev. xxv. 25), and of deliverance from bondage by the payment of a ransom" (*Alexander*). Can we doubt that Isaiah here saw the glory of a Greater than Cyrus? that the mention of the human type suggests the august and adorable Antitype? that from the victories of an earthly prince he is led to speak of the spiritual conquests of the Prince of the kings of the earth, who by means of human instrumentality—ay, by means of "worm Jacob," is to subdue and overcome the most gigantic obstacles? so that, in a bold and expressive

figure, that feeble worm may be said to "thresh the mountains and beat them small, and reduce the hills to chaff;" winnowing them, and causing the tempest to "scatter them abroad" (vers. 15, 16). It is by "the day of small things" Christ is to accomplish the conversion of mankind. He has in every age honoured lowly instrumentality. By a simple gospel in the hands of unlettered preachers, mountains of pride and idolatry have crumbled to pieces. The wisdom of God has been proved to be wiser than men, and the weakness of God to be stronger than men. The sling of faith, and the few stones from the running brook of His own Word—not the vaunted armour of earth's great ones—have brought to the dust the world's giant unbelief. "Who art thou, O great mountain before (the true) Zerubbabel? Thou shalt become a plain" (Zech. iv. 7). And that Divine Word of His, often so despised, will yet complete the conquest it has already achieved in hundreds of lands and in millions of human hearts:—

“Worm Jacob,” not proud Lucifer, will gain the day. While God has given the Redeemer—the true Cyrus—the Prince from the rising sun—commission to “loose the loins of kings, to open before him the two-leaved gates of brass, and to cut the iron bars in sunder,” those by whom His victories are to be achieved are “the poor crowd of Israel:” the treasure is committed to earthen vessels, that the excellency and the power may be altogether of Him.

Are any who read these pages of a fearful and desponding heart, cast down by a great fight of afflictions? perplexing duties confronting you; grave responsibilities overtaking you; fiery trials environing you; legion temptations assailing you; your language that of trembling apprehension, “We have no might against this great company, neither know we what to do?” let them rise in the might of Jacob’s God, saying, in the words of the same pious king, “But our eyes are upon thee” (2 Chron. xx. 12). “By whom shall Jacob arise? for he is

small" (Amos vii. 2). That question is in these verses answered. God, "who comforteth those that are cast down," will make His grace sufficient, and perfect strength in weakness. "Worm Jacob," helpless, down-trodden, despised—was not this the very image which Jacob's Lord applied to Himself in the prophetic 22d Psalm—"I am a *worm*, and no man. . . . Thou hast brought me into the dust of death." Like Him, in the extremity of your weakness, lean on an Omnipotent support. "Be not dismayed," He says here: "Do not look anxiously around to others for help," as that has been rendered (like Judah, when she leant on the brittle papyrus-reed of Egypt); "I will help thee with my faithful right hand." That faithfulness is pledged to bring you through; so that the feeble arm may "thresh the mountains, and make the hills as chaff." "When I am weak, then am I strong." "Nevertheless I am continually with Thee; THOU hast holden me by my right hand."

'The way is dark, my Father ! Cloud on cloud
Is gathering thickly o'er my head, and loud
The thunders roar above me. See, I stand
Like one bewildered ! Father ! take my hand.

The day goes fast, my Father ! and the night
Is drawing darkly down. My faithless sight
Sees ghostly visions : fears, a spectral band,
Encompass me. O Father ! take my hand.

The way is long, my Father ! and my soul
Longs for the rest and quiet of the goal.
While yet I journey through this weary land,
Keep me from wandering. Father ! take my hand.'

"The way is dark, my child ! but leads to light ;
I would not always have thee walk by sight.
My dealings now thou canst not understand,
I meant it so ; but I will take thy hand.

The day goes fast, my child ! But is the night
Darker to Me than day ? In Me is light !
Keep close to Me, and every spectral band
Of fears shall vanish. I will take thy hand.

The way is long, my child ! But it shall be
Not one step longer than is best for thee ;
And thou shalt know, at last, when thou shalt stand
Safe at the goal, how I did take thy hand."

"IN THE MULTITUDE OF MY THOUGHTS WITHIN ME
THY COMFORTS DELIGHT MY SOUL."

*"The poor and the needy seek for water. There is none.
Their tongue with thirst is parched.
I JEHOVAH will hear them,
I the God of Israel will not forsake them.
I will open streams upon bare hills,
And springs in the midst of the valleys.
I will make the desert a standing pool,
And a dry land fountains of waters.
In the wilderness I will give the cedar,
The acacia, the myrtle, and the tree producing oil (Lowth).
I set in the steppe, cypresses (Delitzsch),
The pine and box together ;
That they may see, and know,
And may lay to heart, and understand together,
That the hand of JEHOVAH hath accomplished this,
And the Holy One of Israel hath created it."*

—ISAIAH xli. 17-20.

IV.

“Comfort ye, comfort ye my people,
saith your God.”

“When the poor and needy seek water, and there is none, and their tongue faileth for thirst, I the Lord will hear them, I the God of Israel will not forsake them. I will open rivers in high places, and fountains in the midst of the valleys: I will make the wilderness a pool of water, and the dry land springs of water. I will plant in the wilderness the cedar, the shittah-tree, and the myrtle, and the oil-tree; I will set in the desert the fir-tree, and the pine, and the box-tree together.”

—ISAIAH xli. 17-19.

The ONCE more the silver trumpet sounds,
Rejoicing and these fresh words of solace break
Wilder- upon our ears. They are words spe-
ness. cially addressed to any who may be
in the extremity of grief and trouble.

Such are represented under a figure well understood by the captives of Babylon, many of whom had trodden in their chains the barren

wilderness between Palestine and the place of their exile,—a company of weary and forlorn pilgrims gasping for thirst in the midst of the fiery waste; no Elim palm-groves or wells of water to afford shelter and refreshment;—mocked only, it may be, by the phantom mirage luring them on to disappointment and despair. Lo! all at once, that treeless expanse is transformed into an Eden—the garden of God. On the high, desolate “stretches,” or uplands, He opens rivers; in the midst of the hunger-stricken valleys, fountains gush forth. He converts regions of sterility into a lake, and the steppes of burning sand into flowing water. Not only so, the whole thirsty desert becomes a mass of forest waving with profuse vegetation—trees growing where they never grew before, combining welcome shade with the refreshment of murmuring streams:—Ver. 19, “In the wilderness I will plant” (as these have perhaps been more accurately rendered) “the cedar, and the acacia, and the myrtle, and the tree producing

oil" (*i.e.*, the olive); "I will plant in the desert, the cypress, the pine, and the box together."

What meaneth this figurative picture of a vast oasis—a well-watered grove of stately, fragrant, shady trees? Observe, there are seven kinds of these mentioned;—*seven*—the Hebrew symbol of abundance, diversity, perfection. The words may well be taken, therefore, to denote the plenitude of divine grace vouchsafed in the hour of deepest perplexity and sorrow. When the desolate soul can compare itself to nothing but a wilderness—a dry and thirsty land where no water is; when the heavens are as brass, and the earth as iron; every flower faded on the path, "all the green grass burnt up,"

"And not around the living thing
To which the withered heart can cling,"—

lo! there are spiritual comforts and consolations which unexpectedly arise, as if the barren sand were all at once flooded with streams—trees of every description lining their banks. God yet again, as we found in the previous chapter,

“makes His grace sufficient.” The beautiful part, too, of the picture is, that He bestows grace varied in its manifestations; adapted in its wondrous diversity to meet the wants and necessities and trials of all His suffering people. He has sustaining grace for one, restraining grace for another; strengthening grace for one, sanctifying grace for another; comforting grace for one, dying grace for another. But all these “trees of God” are “full of sap,” from the lowly ‘näbk’ or mountain thorn, to the “cedar of Lebanon which He hath planted.” Each tree may be taken as the type or emblem of a cluster of Bible promises. To the weak, there is the cedar in its strength; to the bereaved, there is the olive, with its ashen leaves, and yet with its “oil of joy” for the mourner; to the fainting and downcast, there is the tall pine and tapering cypress pointing upwards; to the wounded spirit, there is the balsam-tree of Gilead and the fragrant myrtle; to the dying, there is the palm-tree with its graceful fronds,

according to the Eastern tradition, whispering in the ear the name of Jesus! And the further peculiarity of this promise is, that it is in the hour of sorest want and trial and perplexity that that grace is most abundant. It is in the depths of the arid desert, with hillocks of sand on all sides bounding the horizon,—in seasons of loneliest bereavement and uttermost sorrow,—that these palm and acacia and olive and myrtle groves, as if by the hand of an enchanter, rise up to view. It was “at the fourth watch of the night” (when the darkness was deepest, and the hearts of the disciples were most despairing and desponding) that Jesus “cometh unto them walking upon the sea” (Mark vi. 48).

Cannot many an afflicted soul bear testimony to the truth and accuracy of this divine representation?—that man’s extremity is often God’s opportunity,—that when tossed on the midnight of despair, when star after star of earthly hope and joy has been extinguished in the firmament, One, mightier than wind or tempest, has ap-

peared on the crest of the billow, and His presence has changed the storm into a calm, turned darkness into day. And thus, in hours of desolation, have not both the strong figures of this chapter been wondrously realised:—“Worm Jacob,” the type of feebleness, has been able to “thresh the mountains;”—or the thirsty traveller (in other words, he who is being subjected to “great tribulation”), widowed, orphaned, childless, wounded in spirit, bankrupt in worldly means, racked with pain, pining with hidden griefs, the loneliest of lonely pilgrims to eternity, has been enabled, in the strength of God, so to rise above his trials (or rather to receive them in such a spirit of meek and childlike submission) that it is as if “the wilderness and the solitary place had been made glad,” and the desert had “rejoiced and blossomed as the rose,”—as if “the glory of Lebanon” had been given to it, and “the excellency of Carmel and of Sharon.” “Behold,” says Jehovah, in another kindred promise (Hos. ii. 14, 15) “I will allure

her and bring her into the wilderness, and speak comfortably unto her, and I will give her her vineyards from thence, and the valley of Achor for a door of hope, and she shall sing there as in the days of her youth, and as in the day when she came up out of the land of Egypt." But we need not limit or restrict the application of these precious verses to those who are in the extremity of sorrow and distress. That application is world-wide. Who is there to whom this description, more or less, does not apply—"The poor and needy seek water—there is none—their tongue faileth for thirst?" Is it not the too faithful delineation of weary humanity? It is a commonplace saying, but its truthfulness redeems its triteness, that there is nothing in this world which can satisfy immortal longings. "Thirst again," is the too frequent verdict, after its sweetest fountains have been drained. Its best joys leave behind them aching voids, unfulfilled aspirations. After the thirst of its votaries has apparently been

quenched at their favourite rills, of riches, honours, ambition, glory,—their name is the same as before, “Poor and needy;”—their search is the same as ever, “They seek water;”—the epitaph they write over every fresh grave of their hopes is the same, “There is none—their tongue faileth them for thirst.”

And where, then, is that thirst to be quenched? where else are the wells of water to be had, “springing up into everlasting life,” but in the grace and promises of God as revealed in His blessed Word?—“I the Lord will hear them, I the God of Israel will not forsake them; I will open streams in the hills and fountains in the low valleys;” and, like the waters seen by Ezekiel bursting from the threshold of the sanctuary, “Everything lives whither the river cometh.” In these days, when daring spirits, are rising up to decry the authority of Scripture, —to declare, in their arrogance and pride, that Christianity is an effete and worn-out superstition, and the utterances of her holy oracles cunningly

devised fables, which an interested priesthood seeks to palm on the ignorant and the credulous; I would ask in all earnestness, What has ever quenched the longings of the deathless soul but these same glorious revelations which they would now try to supersede by the teachings of science and the systems of philosophy? The world has had its 6000 years to bring in its "more excellent way." What has it devised, apart from the Bible, to heal the sores of the broken, wounded, bleeding heart? What has Rome, in her ages of martial glory, or Greece, in her era of philosophic culture and refinement, done to solve the vexed problem of aching humanity? What streams of comfort has the rod, wielded by their greatest intellects, extorted from the barren rock? What trees have they planted in the world's desert, "whose leaf shall not fade, neither shall the fruit thereof be consumed, whose fruit shall be for meat, and the leaf thereof for medicine?" On the other hand, how many thousands and tens of thou-

sands, racked with pain, tortured with doubt, worn with anxiety, agitated with remorse, darkened with bereavement,—the sick, the weary, the lonely, the dying, have been cheered and refreshed and comforted by the everlasting consolations of this Holy Book. I will say more : when the same infidelity, to which allusion has just been made, will cast its sneers on the canon of the Old Testament as apart from the New, and blasphemously speak of it as “the Jew-book,” “containing some worn-out and antiquated Hebrew treatises, which have long ago served their day and design,”—I would boldly aver, that had we no more of the Old Testament scriptures than these twenty-seven chapters of Isaiah, we should have a Repertory of sublime solaces to be searched for in vain amid all the lore of classic antiquity. These twenty-seven chapters would of themselves be gospel enough on which to live and to die. They and the Psalms together, would make up a “grove” and “paradise” of consolation and guidance, such as

the Prophet depicts in the present verses, which would transform the valley of tears into a land of Beulah. Socrates and Plato never made the manual of comfort for the living—never made the pillow for the dying head, which the hands of David and Isaiah have done.

Have we been enabled, in varied ways, individually to test the power and reality of these “exceeding great and precious promises?” Feeling our spiritual thirst, has the prayer ascended, “As the hart panteth after the water-brooks, so panteth my soul after Thee, O God! my soul thirsteth for God, for the living God?” And can we record the gracious answer in the words of that grand psalm of the returning exiles, which are in strikingly beautiful harmony with those we have just been pondering ;—“He turneth the wilderness into a standing water, and dry ground into water-springs. And there He maketh the hungry to dwell, that they may prepare a city for habitation, and sow the fields, and plant vineyards, which may yield fruits of increase”

(Ps. cvii. 35-37)? If such be our happy and joyful experience, let us carry away with us, as the great lesson of this chapter, supreme and unwavering confidence in God for the future. All other worldly and creature confidences, like those of the idol worshippers here described, are vanity and a lie. "Their idols are silver and gold, the work of men's hands. . . . They that make them are like unto them, so is every one that trusteth in them. O Israel, trust thou in the Lord, He is their help and their shield! O House of Aaron, trust in the Lord, He is their help and their shield! Ye that fear the Lord, trust in the Lord, He is their help and their shield!" (Ps. cxv. 9, 10, 11.) If, on the other hand, with some the stream may for the time be curtailed, the sun veiled in clouds and darkness, flowers that once bloomed fading on their path, and the once joyous harp hanging tuneless and silent on the willows—they may take courage and heart-cheer from these very utterances of divine comfort on which we have now been

meditating, and chide their despondency with faith's rebuke, "Why art thou cast down, O my soul? Hope thou in God, for I shall yet praise Him."

"I shall find again the hopes long vanished,
Like the swallows when the storms are gone:
Fountains shall be opened in the desert,
Streams by the wayside, while journeying on.
Flowers of love and promise shall be springing
Where the cruel thorn and wormwood sprung,
And the homeward path lie bright in sunshine,
Where my sad harp on the willows hung."

"IN THE MULTITUDE OF MY THOUGHTS WITHIN ME
THY COMFORTS DELIGHT MY SOUL."

*"Behold my Servant, whom I uphold ;
My Chosen, whom my soul loveth :
I have laid my Spirit upon Him ;
He shall publish truth to the Gentiles.
He shall not cry, nor raise a clamour (Lowth),
Nor cause in the public places to be heard His voice.
The bruised reed He shall not break,
And the dimly burning flax shall He not extinguish :
He will establish His religion in truth.
He shall not be dim nor be broken (Alexander),
Until He hath firmly seated religion in the earth :
And the distant nations shall earnestly wait for His law (Lowth).*

I JEHOVAH have called Thee for a righteous purpose,
And I will hold Thee by Thy hand, and I keep Thee,
And will give Thee for a covenant to the people,
A light to the nations ;
*To open the eyes of the blind,
To bring the bondsman out of prison,
And from the dungeon those that sit in darkness.*

*I will lead the blind in a way they have not known ;
In paths they knew not I will make them tread :
I turn dark spaces before them into light (Delitzsch),
And the rugged ways into a smooth plain.
These things will I do for them, and not forsake them."*

—ISAIAH xlii. 1-4, 6, 7-16.

V.

**“Comfort ye, comfort ye my people,
saith your God.”**

“Behold my Servant, whom I uphold ; mine elect, in whom my soul delighteth : I have put my Spirit upon Him ; He shall bring forth judgment to the Gentiles. He shall not cry, nor lift up, nor cause His voice to be heard in the street. . . . And I will bring the blind by a way that they knew not ; I will lead them in paths that they have not known : I will make darkness light before them, and crooked things straight. These things will I do unto them, and not forsake them.”

—ISAIAH xlii. 1, 2, 16.

**The Divine
Antitype.**

A GREATER assuredly than Cyrus is here. As the sun of heaven extinguishes with his superior brilliancy the lesser lights of the firmament, so does the name of Cyrus pale before the introduction of that of his mightier Antitype ; the victories of the earthly hero are merged in the contemplation of the spiritual triumphs of the Redeemer

of the world, who, in the fulness of time, was to ride forth in glory and in majesty, "because of meekness and truth and righteousness."

That it is Christ and none other who is here spoken of, we have the undoubted testimony in St Matthew's Gospel (xii. 17), where the very words of the Prophet are applied by the Evangelist to his divine Master. In strange and remarkable confirmation of the accuracy of the reference, a learned commentator notes that there is a similar Messianic interpretation given of the passage in the Chaldee Paraphrase, where the rendering is, "Behold my Servant Messiah, my Beloved, in whom my Word is well pleased; I will put my Holy Spirit upon Him, and He will reveal my judgment to the Gentiles:" also, that in the Arabic version, the title or prefix is, "A Prophecy concerning Christ the Lord."*

And how beautifully, tenderly, and truthfully is the character of the adorable Redeemer here

* See Dr Wordsworth *in loc.*

pourtrayed! "We discern exactly the loved features of Him to whom all prophecy points, and who saw Himself therein" (*Umbreit*). A holy Being was to arise,—gentle, meek, unostentatious, unobtrusive—"He shall not strive nor cry, neither shall any man hear His voice in the streets." His kingdom was to come "not with observation." Like His own Holy Sanctuary in Jerusalem, His spiritual Temple was to rise in calm impressive silence. "There was neither hammer, nor axe, nor any tool of iron, heard in the house while it was in building" (1 Kings vi. 7). His conquests were not to be those of brute or material force, but effected by the power of principle. "The battle of the warrior is with confused noise and garments rolled in blood;"—the great ones of earth were heralded by pomp and glitter and dazzling display: with blare of trumpet and clarion they ascended to the Temple of Fame, trampling down the weak, establishing their own sovereignty or renown on the fallen,—their triumphal car crushing under

its wheels the weak and feeble. How different with Him! He sought not His own glory. He was unambitious of earthly fame. His mission was one of tenderness to others; "to the poor also, and him that hath no helper" (Ps. lxxii. 12). Helplessness crept unbidden to His feet; poverty and shame, in their squalid rags, tracked His footsteps; sinners went and wept out their tale of sorrow to this Infinitely Pure One: bereft hearts and tearful eyes were never unsuccoured by "the Brother born for adversity." Almightiness, indeed, was in that voice which quelled the storm, or which gave back to weeping widows and mothers and sisters their "loved and lost." But it was not deeds of *power* but deeds of tenderness He delighted to perform. It was not the strong and mighty, but the prostrate and defenceless, "the bruised reed and the smoking flax," around whom He threw His protecting shield. "He came not to call the righteous but sinners to repentance." And this gracious rule was to continue till "He send

forth" (as the quotation is in St Matthew) "judgment unto victory"—*i.e.*, till the reign of truth was victorious, and "judgment" or righteousness was firmly established in every part of the habitable earth.

The Prophet next describes the certainty of these triumphs. The reed *may* be broken, the smoking flax *may* be extinguished (ver. 3), but no arrest can be put upon His conquests: "He shall not fail nor be discouraged,"—or, He shall not, like them (for there is a contrast and antithesis implied), be "dim" or "broken,"—dim like the smouldering flax, or broken like the crushed reed,—"till He have set judgment on the earth," and secured a sure footing and standing-ground for His glorious gospel.

It is a peculiarity in Isaiah, that very often when he announces some signal mercy, some new manifestation of Jehovah's power and goodness, he appends to it a hymn of thanksgiving. It is so here. He had just announced that the religion of Messiah-Jesus is to spread through-

out the whole world; that while the Jew is to be the first to receive the boon, the glad tidings are to spread from shore to shore. The Prophet makes it the occasion of an anthem of praise. He calls on the nations to "sing a *new* song," and glorify the name of the great Redeemer. It is to begin with the Jewish Alleluia, but it is to deepen into the Gentile Hosannah (ver. 10):—"Sing unto the Lord a new song, and His praise from the ends of the earth." The islands are called upon to raise the first notes; next, the wilderness and their cities; then Kedar—the land of Ishmael and Edom—the roaming Bedouins in their tents, as well as the inhabitants of the rock-crowned villages. Following this, is magnificently delineated the triumphal march of Christ, like the crowned rider in Revelation, with the bow in His hand, "Conquering and to conquer:"—Ver. 13, "The Lord shall go forth as a mighty man" (or, as Luther and Calvin render it, "as a giant"), "He shall stir up jealousy like a man of war: He shall cry, yea, roar; He

shall prevail against His enemies." And while He is represented, in the case of His foes, as "making waste the mountains" and "drying up the pools," His tender, considerate, and beneficent treatment of His own people is thus described: "I will bring the blind by a way that they knew not; I will lead them in paths that they have not known: I will make darkness light before them, and crooked things straight. These things will I do unto them, and not forsake them" (ver. 15, 16).

These last precious words, like silver bells, ring their chimes of comfort in the ears of many. How many are there whose way is a way of mystery! By reason of unexpected earthly calamity or sudden bereavement, the sun of their earthly joys has gone down, and the darkness of night has all at once surrounded them. They can see no ray in an uncertain future, "no bright light in the clouds." Like the Israelites, while still on the Egyptian shores of the Red Sea, "they are entangled, the wilderness hath shut

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them in." Oh how wondrously does God, in such extremity, often make good His interposing love and succour,—giving help from trouble when vain is the help of man; leading the blind, not by the paths they would have desired, or which they would themselves have chosen; but rather, it may be for a time, through intricate windings, mazy labyrinths, and apparently deeper environing gloom: yet, at last, vindicating the rectitude of His procedure and the faithfulness of His word, by the promised light of evening-time (Zech. xiv. 7); leading them forth "by *the right way*, that they might go to a city of habitation" (Ps. cvii. 7). How many a pilgrimage journey is thus studded with Ebenezers, testifying, "unless the Lord had been my help, my soul had almost dwelt in silence; when my foot slipped, Thy mercy, O Lord, held me up!" Shall we not implicitly trust this Almighty Guide and Counsellor for the future,—surrendering our own wills to His better wisdom, our own paths to His better direction;

so that, even should the shadow of thickest night come to fall around us, we may be able to say, "Thou wilt light my candle, the Lord my God will enlighten my darkness?"

"Lead, kindly Light, amid th' encircling gloom,

Lead Thou me on !

The night is dark, and I am far from home,

Lead Thou me on !

Keep Thou my feet ; I do not ask to see

The distant way ; one step enough for me.

I was not ever thus, nor prayed that Thou

Should'st lead me on ;

I loved to see and choose my path, but now

Lead Thou me on !

I loved the garish day, and, spite of fears,

Pride ruled my will ; remember not past years.

So long Thy power has blest me, sure it still

Will lead me on !

O'er moor and fen, o'er crag and torrent, till

The night is gone ;

And with the morn those angel faces smile,

Which I have loved long since, and lost awhile !"

"IN THE MULTITUDE OF MY THOUGHTS WITHIN ME

THY COMFORTS DELIGHT MY SOUL."

“Behold my Servant, whom I uphold ;
My Chosen one, in whom my soul delights.

*The crushed reed shall He not break,
And the dimly burning wick He shall not quench” (Lowth
—Delitzsch).*

—ISAIAH xlii. 1-3.

“That it might be fulfilled which was spoken by Esaias the prophet, saying, Behold my Child, whom I have chosen (*Wiclif, Tyndale, and Cranmer Versions*) ; my Darling (*Wiclif*), in whom my soul delighteth : I will put my Spirit upon Him, and judgment to the Gentiles shall He show. He shall not contend, nor cry out, neither shall any man hear in the streets His voice. The reed bruised He shall not break, and flax that beginneth to burn shall He not quench, till He send forth judgment unto victory ; and heathen men (*Wiclif*) shall hope in His name” (*Bagster’s Hexapla*).—Matt. xii. 17-21.

VI.

**“Comfort ye, comfort ye my people,
saith your God.”**

**“A bruised reed shall He not break, and the smoking flax
shall He not quench.”**

—ISAIAH xlii. 3.

**The Bruised
Reed and
Smoking
Flax.**

NO verse in this beautiful chapter, nor in this “Book of Comfort,” is more comforting than this. God has His strong ones in His Church—His oaks of Bashan and cedars of Lebanon; noble forest trees, spreading far and wide their branches of faith and love and holiness;—those who are deeply rooted in the truth, able to wrestle with fierce tempests of unbelief, and to grapple with temptations in their sterner forms. But He has His weaklings and His saplings also—those that require to be tenderly shielded from the blast, and who are liable, from con-

stitutional temperament, to become the prey of doubts and fears, to which the others are strangers. Sensitive in times of trial, irresolute in times of difficulty and danger, unstable in times of severe temptation ; or it may be in perpetual disquietude and alarm about their spiritual safety. To such, the loving ways and dealings of the Saviour are thus unfolded—“A bruised reed shall He not break, and the smoking flax shall He not quench.” Let us proceed to note the beauty and significancy of the twofold figure.

(1.) *The bruised reed.* The reed, or “calamus,” is a plant with hollow stem, which grew principally by the side of lakes or rivers. Those who have been in Palestine are familiar with it in the tangled thickets which still line the shores of the ancient Merom and Gennesaret, or, above all, in the dense copse fringing the banks of the Jordan. The plant might well be taken as an emblem of whatever was weak, fragile, brittle. The foot of the wild beast that made its lair in

the jungle, trampled it to pieces. Its slender stalk bent or snapped under the weight of the bird that sought to make it a perch. The wind and hail-storm shivered its delicate tubes, or laid them prostrate on the ground. "A reed shaken by the wind," was the metaphor employed by One, whose eyes, in haunts most loved and frequented by Him, had oftentimes gazed on this significant emblem of human weakness and instability. Once broken, it was rendered of no use. Other stems which had been bent by the hurricane might, by careful nursing and tending, be recovered; but the reed, with its heavy culm, once shattered, became worthless. In a preceding chapter (Isa. xxxvi. 6) it is thus spoken of as an emblem of tottering, fragile Egypt—"Lo thou trustest in the staff of this broken reed—on Egypt, whereon, if a man lean, it will go into his hand and pierce it." Some have considered that a reference is made, in the present passage, to the reeds which the shepherds of old used in their rustic pipes on

the hills of Canaan. One of these, bruised, split, or broken, would make the whole instrument discordant. We may imagine David playing on such an instrument in the valleys of Bethlehem, before he got his golden harp on Mount Zion. He would probably fashion that mountain-pipe with his own hands,—plucking the reeds from some watercourse among the hills of Judah as he was watching his father's sheep, and using it as an accompaniment to "the Lord's song." But if one of the tubes had received an injury, what would he do? He would never think of repairing it; but taking the instrument to pieces, he would throw the mutilated and bruised sedge away, and hie him down to the ample reed-forest in the valley, to insert a new one.

'Not such,' says Christ, 'are my dealings with any of my people, who may be broken with convictions of sin, and wounded in conscience—"I will not break the bruised reed:"' or rather, as that negative assertion is the Hebrew way of conveying a strong affirmative (*Blunt*), it is

equivalent to saying, that He *will* bind up the broken heart, that He *will* cement the splintered stem of the hanging bulrush, endowing it with new life and strength and vigour, causing it to "spring up among the grass, as willows by the watercourses; that He will pardon, pity, comfort, relieve! Look at that same sweet Psalmist of Israel: who more a "bruised reed" than he? God had inspired his soul,—made it a many-stringed instrument in discoursing His praise; but now it lies a broken mutilated thing, with the stain of crimson guilt upon it, tuneless and mute. "I kept silence," says he, "my bones waxed old through my roaring all the day long. For day and night Thine hand was heavy upon me, my moisture is turned into the drought of summer." Does God desert him? does He cast the reed away, and seek to replace the void by another, worthier and better? Does He mock the cry of penitential sorrow, as through anguished tears that stricken one thus implored forgiveness—"Have mercy upon me, O God,

according to Thy loving-kindness: according to the multitude of Thy tender mercy, blot out my transgression?" No. Hear him detail his own experience—"I acknowledged my sin unto Thee, and mine iniquity have I not hid; I said, I will confess my transgressions unto the Lord; and Thou forgavest the iniquity of my sin." And then he takes up the retuned instrument, and sings for the encouragement of others—"For this shall every one that is godly pray unto Thee in a time when Thou mayest be found." In the case of some aromatic plants, it is when bruised they give forth the sweetest fragrance. So, it is often the soul, crushed with a sense of sin, which sends forth the sweetest aroma of humility, gratitude, and love. "Blessed are they that mourn, for they shall be comforted."

(2.) But, not only is it predicted of this coming Saviour, that "the bruised reed He shall not break," it is added, "*The smoking flax shall He not quench.*" We may be warranted perhaps

in taking this second metaphor to apply, not so much to those who are haunted with the remembrance of any special or presumptuous sin, as to those who gradually, perhaps almost imperceptibly, have suffered declension in spiritual things—who are mourning the general languor of their spiritual life, the deterioration or decay of their Christian graces. They hear others spoken of as being “strong in faith”—theirs is not entitled to the name. They hear of others spoken of as ardent in love—they cannot mock so noble and heavenly a grace by identifying it with their own. They read, in the case of others, of glowing ecstasies and holy experiences:—they are strangers to all such. If they have the retrospect of better times, now at all events they can only tell of declension and backsliding. If they can revert to hallowed hours, which still linger, like a strain of far off music, in their memories,—these have now only left behind them an aching void and gloomy silence. Like Samson they go forth,

but it is with shorn locks, weak and degenerate as other men. Like the children of Israel once "carrying bows," they have "turned faint in the day of battle." Once under the palm-groves of Elim, and drinking its refreshing wells, they are now dwelling in the dark tents of Kedar. The joy of their religion is departed; and if they were asked for some image to describe their feelings, they would point to the smoking flax or tow, smouldering and no more—"the glimmering wick of faith," as St Jerome calls it;—a spark of fire alone left, the noxious smoke already rising, as if premonitory of its entire extinction.

Such a piece of smoking flax was the once hero-hearted Prophet, seated amid the savage rocks of Horeb; away from duty,—morbid, sullen, panic-stricken,—forgetful of the encouragements of Carmel and the miracles of Cherith,—indulging in the ungrateful soliloquy—"It is enough, take away my life;" God has forgotten me; "I am no better than my fathers." Does the Great Being he thus unworthily dis-

trusted, accept him at his word? Does He crush the feeble spark, or leave the desert whirlwind to blow out the flickering, expiring flame? Nay—"What doest thou here, Elijah?" 'Arise; go anoint Jehu, go anoint Hazael; go back to duty; I will yet make thee a burning and a shining light in Israel.'

Such a piece of smoking flax (to take a New Testament example), was the craven Apostle as he is seen skulking with uneasy step, in a momentous hour, within the vestibule of the high-priest's palace. Peter, indeed, was an illustration of the bruised reed and smoking flax in one. In his case, too, it was not the gradual wasting and expiring of the flame, but rather its threatened swift extinction—about to be quenched in sudden darkness. It is a terrible collapse of loud profession and parade of courage! He has deserted his Master in the hour He most needed his sympathy and presence and loyal fidelity. The proud vessel of yesterday, bounding with full sail under favour-

ing breezes, lies to-day, seemingly an abandoned, dismantled hulk on the rocks! But is that vessel hopelessly to be broken up, and its fragments scattered over the trough of the ocean? Is there no tide of love that will once more set it floating on the waters? Is that smoking flax to burn itself out in darkness and despair? Has the vital spark really fled and left nothing save the nauseous fumes,—the memories of apostacy, the breach of plighted faith and sworn discipleship, with the deep aggravation of oaths and curses? Are there no words of forgiving tenderness that are yet to fan the “glimmering wick” into its old flame, transform weakness into strength, cowardice and pusillanimity into heroic devotion? Yes!—“Go your way, tell His disciples, *and Peter*,” was the message of personal, discriminating, kindness and mercy. ‘Go and tell the most recreant of these disciples—the flax that has burnt most feebly, that I am to come again and fan it into deathless consecration.’ And so it was.

When the faithless disciple and the faithful Master confronted one another, face to face, at the Lake of Tiberias, and when the fire of coals was kindled on the shore (fit emblem of the better rekindling of apparently smothered and extinguished life and love), see how the tenderest of rebukes ever uttered to the erring, brought tears to the eye and burning confessions, thrice repeated, to the lip. The slumbering ashes of an unquenched and unquenchable devotion awoke. The smoking flax burst into a fervent flame; and from the path of duty and of suffering which he manfully trod in response to the call "Follow thou me," there was, from that day onwards, no deflection!

Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and to-day and for ever; and for all who feel, in their own case, the accuracy of the figure "smoking flax," He has words of encouragement and heart-cheer. Listen to the voice which addressed the "Son of Jonas" by the lake-side of Gennesaret, as it was heard, yet a few years later, from

the Throne of Glory, admonishing one of the Asiatic churches and its individual members. That church had become lukewarm, backsliding, lethargic, apostate. It is described, not by His inspired servant, but by His own lips of Omniscience—(seen by Him who walketh in the midst of the golden candlesticks, and “whose eyes are as a flame of fire”), as having “a name that thou livest and art dead” (Rev. iii. 1). What is His verdict and deliverance on those thus trembling on the verge of a confirmed apostacy—apparently dead while they live? Is it, ‘Bury the dead out of my sight? cast the bruised reed away? quench and extinguish that smoking flax, which is only rising like defiled incense from my holy altar, and polluting my holy courts?’ Nay, “Be watchful, and *strengthen the things which remain, that are ready to die*” (ver. 2).

Backslider! whatever may have been the cause of present alienation from the “God of your life,” do not surrender yourself to an un-

warranted despondency. The cry of the truant wanderer from the fold, as it mourns its estrangement and longs for return, will not be unheard by the Shepherd of souls. The wail of the disconsolate spouse, rising as it does from the depths of a yet devoted heart, will not fail to reach the ear of the loved and lost One she seeks—"Tell me, O Thou whom my soul loveth, where Thou feedest, where Thou makest Thy flock to rest at noon: for why should I be as one that turneth aside by the flocks of Thy companions?" (Sol. Song i. 7). No, He will not reject your faith *because* it is weak, nor your love because it is feeble. He will not despise the day of small things. Even to the Philadelphian Church, which had only a *little* strength, there was set before it "an open door which no man could shut" (Rev. iii. 8). There is life in the animalcule as well as in the lordly lion. There is life in the tiny moss or spire of grass as well as in the giant tree. There is life in the helpless infant as well as in the full grown man.

So, "little faith" as well as "great faith" indicates the existence of spiritual life; and once the spiritual life has commenced, it can never die. He that hath begun the good work will carry it on;—that life is "hid with Christ in God." Unlike the candle of the wicked, who can put it out? Not God, for He hath justified. Not Christ, for He hath died. Not the Holy Spirit, for He seals until the day of everlasting Redemption. Not death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers; for none shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord. Yes, and if we were to ascend amid the throng of the upper sanctuary, we should see, among glorified lamps set in that heavenly Temple, those who were once "smoking flax," feeble sparks,—but who now, purified from the smoke and dross of earthly corruption, are shining "as the brightness of the firmament, and as the stars for ever and ever!"

"Spare me, Thou who lov'st to spare!
Gently on me lay Thy hand:

Grasp the bruised reed with care,
Let the smoking flax be fanned.
As a father, bending low,
Listens to his lisping child,
So to me Thy pity show,
By the world and sin beguiled ;
Sweet the sound I hear from Thee,
Cast thy burden upon Me."

"IN THE MULTITUDE OF MY THOUGHTS WITHIN ME
THY COMFORTS DELIGHT MY SOUL."

“Who hath given up Jacob to plundering, and Israel to the spoilers?

Is it not JEHOVAH, against whom we have sinned
And they were not willing in His ways to walk,
And hearkened not to His law.

Then He poured upon him in burning heat His wrath,
And the violence of war :

It kindled in flames round about, yet he did not regard it ;
And it burned, yet he did not lay it to heart.

But now, thus saith JEHOVAH

Thy Creator, O Jacob, and who formed thee, O Israel,

Fear not thou : for I have redeemed thee,

I have called thee by thy name ; thou art mine.

When thou passest through the waters, I will be with thee ;

And through the rivers, they shall not overwhelm thee :

When thou walkest through the fire, thou shall not be scorched,

And the flame shall not take hold of thee.

For I, JEHOVAH, am thy God,

The Holy One of Israel, thy Redeemer :

I have given up Egypt as a ransom for thee,

Ethiopia and Seba in thy stead.

Because thou art dear in mine eyes,

Thou hast been honoured, and I have loved thee :

Therefore will I give up men instead of thee,

And peoples for thy life (*Delitzsch*).

Fear not ; for I am with thee.”

—ISAIAH xlii. 24, 25 ; xliii. 1-5.

VII.

**“Comfort ye, comfort ye, my people,
saith your God.”**

“But now thus saith the Lord that created thee, O Jacob, and He that formed thee, O Israel, Fear not : for I have redeemed thee, I have called thee by thy name ; thou art mine. When thou passest through the waters, I will be with thee ; and through the rivers, they shall not overflow thee : when thou walkest through the fire, thou shalt not be burned ; neither shall the flame kindle upon thee. For I am the Lord thy God, the Holy One of Israel, thy Saviour.”

—ISAIAH xliii. 1, 2, 3.

Comfort on MANY of these addresses of Isaiah,
Comfort. and especially the present, owe their
power and impressiveness to contrast. In the close of the previous chapter, we have a vivid representation of the obduracy of the Jewish people, which had led Jehovah to “give Jacob for a spoil, and Israel to the robbers ; pouring out upon them “the fury of

His anger and the strength of battle" (chap. xlii. 24, 25). But the tones of reproach and vengeance are merged, all at once, into those of divinest consolation. It seems like a father weeping over his prodigal; or, in the prospect of some great sorrow, trying to heap solace upon solace. "Love," as it has been beautifully said, "which had retreated behind the wrath, returns again." Israel's Covenant-God sets His bow in the cloud; and we almost forget the presence of the cloud, in the beauty and brilliancy of the varied prismatic colours.

The imagery is all Jewish. He reminds Israel in Babylon, and the Church in every age, of His former wondrous interpositions. When He speaks of "passing through the waters," He would recall, what was always regarded as the proudest memory in the Hebrew annals, the crossing of the Red Sea, the destruction of Pharaoh, and the salvation of His people. When He speaks of "passing through the rivers," He would recall the passage of the

Jordan at the close of the wilderness wanderings. As the exodus began with a miracle, so did it end with one:—"The sea saw it and fled, Jordan was driven back" (Ps. cxiv. 3). When He speaks of "walking through the fire," He probably alludes to the anticipated deliverance of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, when they were cast into the burning furnace, and emerged unscathed from the flames. When He farther speaks of "giving Egypt for a ransom, Ethiopia and Seba for His people," He reverts, in the first instance, to that same earliest chapter in their history, when Egypt's chivalry were overwhelmed in ruin, in order that the Hebrews might be liberated; also to a subsequent crisis, when the hosts of Sennacherib were diverted from their purpose of destroying Jerusalem, by being led southwards to "Egypt and Ethiopia." The Holy City was thus saved and ransomed, by devoting Egypt and her allies instead, to the fury of the rapacious invader. In the Chaldee paraphrase, the words are ren-

dered, "In the beginning, when you passed through the Red Sea, my word was your aid. Pharaoh and Egypt, who were mighty like the waters of a river, were not able to prevail against you, and the kingdoms which were strong like flame could not consume you." Whatever the special references may be, the object and design of the passage are manifest: to regard Jehovah's interventions in the past as a sure pledge of His presence and protection and love for the future. The words begin with the gracious "Fear not," and they end with the same favourite refrain—"Fear not." It sounds like the lullaby of the mother by the cradle of her child, in the midst of the thunderstorm, hushing it to rest with songs of tenderness.

"Waters," "rivers," "fire," "flame," this multiplication of imagery would seem to denote that the Church collectively, and the true Israel of God individually, may expect to encounter trials, manifold, diversified, severe; at one time like angry floods, at another like devouring

flames; trials coming, often when and where we least expect. But the consolatory lesson of the address is, that the God who permits or sends the afflictions will Himself be present with His upholding arm;—and, better still, that He will not suffer these to go beyond what His people are able to bear—that He will say, alike to flood and flame, “Thus far, and no farther;” or, to use another simile of the Prophet, that “He stayeth His rough wind in the day of the east wind” (Isa. xxvii. 8). In the last verse of the preceding chapter, Jehovah says of the literal Jerusalem (referring to the armies of Babylon which had come against her with the torch as well as the sword), “It hath set on fire round about:” ‘but,’ He seems to add, ‘not so, O true Church of God—great anti-typical Jerusalem,’ “Fear not; *thou* shalt not be burned.”

“Her walls, defended by His grace,
No power shall e’er o’erthrow,
Salvation is her bulwark sure
Against the assailing foe.”

That city, like the mystic one spoken of in the Apocalypse, "lieth foursquare." He here places a quadruple rampart around her, and around each of her favoured citizens, in His revelation of Himself as *Creator, Redeemer, Covenant-God*, and *Father*. Ver. 1, 3, "Thus saith the Lord that *created* thee." "I have *redeemed* thee"—"thy Saviour." "I am the Lord *thy* God." "I have (paternally, by adoption) called thee by thy *name*; thou art Mine." To His Church, precious in the past—so precious that mighty empires have been given in ransom for her, and made the instruments for her deliverance—He declares that He is ready to give similar pledges in times to come. Ver. 4, "Thou *hast* been honourable, and I have loved thee; therefore will I give men for thee, and people for thy life." Babylon was, signally, such a ransom now. Ver. 14, "For your sake I have sent to Babylon, and have brought down all their nobles, and the Chaldeans, whose cry is in the ships." On the night of the surprise of

Cyrus, the ships in the harbour were thronged by the panic-stricken warriors and nobles, who sought thus an ignominious escape from massacre. By means of the Euphrates, and by a canal cut to the Tigris, there was a double outlet for the fugitives, either to the Persian Gulf or the Caspian Sea (*Wordsw.*) The "Beauty of the Chaldees excellency"—the city of a hundred gates—was captured, in order to effect the deliverance of God's bondaged people. "Worm Jacob!" and "ye poor crowd of Israel!" that wild shout of terror and confusion rising from the harbour of fallen Babylon, was "for your sake!" With the reiteration common in Isaiah, the Divine Speaker again (in ver. 16) appeals to His former interpositions in behalf of His Church, when He made bare His holy arm in the sight of the heathen, as a guarantee for similar deliverances in the future. Yet, once more, it is the grand old story of Egyptian memory, that is adduced as the first type and instalment of these. Ver. 16, "Thus saith the

Lord, which maketh a way in the sea, and a path in the mighty waters; which bringeth forth the chariot and the horse, the army, and the power; they" (all the proud Pharaohs of the world, who in the future, as in the past, shall attempt to lord it over my Church) "shall lie down together, they shall not rise; they are extinct, they are quenched as tow."

The same hand is not shortened that it cannot save. He has mighty undeveloped purposes of love and mercy in connection with His chosen Israel in all ages. "I have called thee," says He, "by thy name:"—or, as that may mean, "I have called out thy name" (*Delitzsch*)—"called it out"—shouted it in the midst of the nations—as "the people I have formed for myself, and who will show forth my praise" (ver. 21). And the same voice will yet summon north, south, east, and west, to give back His honoured sons and daughters, "even every one that is called by my name" (ver. 5, 6, 7). More than all, He who has made over entire

kingdoms for the ransom of His Israel in former days, has given a more precious gift than Ethiopia and Seba, yea, than a whole aggregate of nations, for the redemption of His elect Church throughout the whole world. Have we not, in this mightiest Ransom, a pledge and guarantee for the bestowment of every needed blessing, alike for His Israel collectively and for believers individually. "He that spared not His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, how shall He not with Him also, freely give us all things?" (Rom. viii. 32.)

Let us joyfully listen to this soothing refrain, this tender lullaby of God, "Fear not! fear not!" We may well trust the faithfulness of the Great Shepherd, who "calleth His own sheep by name, and leadeth them out." Throughout life, in the midst of all its trials, amid envioning floods and flames, we may safely rely on the strength and security of that chain, with its fourfold link, which binds us to the Everlasting arms—'Creator,' 'Redeemer,' 'God in Cove-

nant,' 'Father ;'—and at death, when a Greater than Cyrus shall appear “unexpectedly” at the midnight hour—when the startling summons shall be heard, “Behold He cometh!”—when the cry of many shall be “in the ships,” seeking unavailing shelter in refuges of lies, from the face of the Conqueror:—Oh! on that “day of the Lord of Hosts,” which is to be “upon all the ships of Tarshish, and upon all pleasant pictures” (Isa. ii. 16), to be able, like captive Israel in Babylon, to hear, in that very cry, the proclamation to His Church that the last fetters of bondage are removed; that the harp may be taken down from the willows, and the last tear dried. Crossing the border river and entering the true Canaan, we shall listen to the joyous welcome, “Fear not, I have redeemed thee; I have called thee by thy name; thou art *mine* :” while this shall be the confession and song of Eternity,—“We went through fire and through water; but Thou broughtest us out into a wealthy place” (Ps. lxvi. 12).

"Thou knowest, Lord, the weariness and sorrow
Of the sad heart that comes to Thee for rest ;
Cares of to-day and burdens for to-morrow,
Blessings implored, and sins to be confessed.

Thou knowest all the past—how long and blindly,
On the dark mountains the lost wanderer strayed,
How the Good Shepherd followed, and how kindly
He bore it home upon His shoulders laid.

Thou knowest all the future gleams of gladness,
By stormy clouds too quickly overcast,
Hours of sweet fellowship, and parting sadness,
And the dark river to be crossed at last.

Therefore I come, Thy gentle call obeying,
And lay my sins and sorrows at Thy feet ;
On everlasting strength my weakness staying,
Clothed in Thy robe of righteousness complete."

"IN THE MULTITUDE OF MY THOUGHTS WITHIN ME

THY COMFORTS DELIGHT MY SOUL."

" This people whom I have formed for myself,
 My praise shall they recount.
 But thou hast not invoked me, O Jacob ;
 Thou hast not wearied thyself for me, O Israel (*Delitzsch*).
 Thou hast not brought me the lamb of thy burnt-offerings,
 Neither with thy sacrifices hast thou honoured me :
 I have not made a slave of thee in (exacting) oblations,
 Nor wearied thee with (demands of) frankincense (*Barnes*).
 Thou hast bought me no spice-cane for silver,
 Nor refreshed me with the fat of thy sacrifices (*Delitzsch*) ;
 But thou hast burdened me with thy sins (*Lowth*),
 Thou hast wearied me with thine iniquities.
*I, I am He who blotteth out thy transgressions for mine own
 sake,
 And thy sins I will not remember.*
 Remind me of thy plea ; let us enter into debate together :
 Declare thou, that thou mayest justify thyself.

*I have made thy transgressions as a dense cloud to vanish,
 And thy sins like a vapour ;
 Return to me ; for I have redeemed thee."*

—ISAIAH xliii. 21-26 ; xliv. 22.

VIII.

“Comfort ye, comfort ye my people,
saith your God.”

“I, even I, am He that blotteth out thy transgressions for mine own sake, and will not remember thy sins. . . . I have blotted out, as a thick cloud, thy transgressions, and, as a cloud, thy sins : return unto me ; for I have redeemed thee.”

—ISAIAH xliii. 25 ; xliv. 22.

**Sovereign
Grace.**

WHO are these to whom the gracious promises just dwelt upon in the preceding exposition have been given ; who have had heaped upon them pledge on pledge of covenant faithfulness and love, till word and metaphor can go no farther ? Who are they that are thus guaranteed a divine escort through flood and river, fire and flame ; for whose sake the sandy desert is so transformed, that the very wild beasts roaming its

steppes and jungles—"the beasts of prey," "the dragons and ostriches" (owls), are poetically represented as doing homage to the goodness of Israel's God? (ver. 20.) When Jehovah thus enumerates His catalogue of mercies, and His arguments for protection and guidance, what claims have His people to advance, for such tokens of paternal and beneficent regard?

Alas! it is a mournful blank; they are distinguished only for their neglect and sin. After bringing into forcible relief the lights of the picture—the glowing foreground of His own loving-kindnesses, the Divine Speaker pourtrays the dark, gloomy background (ver. 22)—"But thou hast not called upon me, O Jacob; thou hast been weary of me, O Israel." They had mocked Him with their half-hearted offerings and devotions. The formal sacrifice was there; but the holy motive and loving will which sanctified the gift were absent,—that which He valued more than the sweet cane or "calamus" (the most prized aromatic of Arabia) (ver. 24).

And then, in one of those antithetical clauses, or 'balances of words,' so frequent in Isaiah, He thus contrasts His own and His people's doings (ver. 23)—"I have not *burdened* thee in exacting oblations; I have not *wearied* thee in demanding incense." . . . "But thou hast *burdened* me with thy sins; thou hast *wearied* me with thine iniquities" (ver. 24). He challenges them to refute the justness of His charge, citing them as accused parties before a tribunal of equity. He puts it in their power to vindicate themselves, and disprove His allegation if they can (ver. 26)—"Put me in remembrance; let us plead (or argue the cause) together: declare thou, that thou mayest be justified" (or, if thou canst, "clear thyself"). But the indictment is one too well founded, vindication is impossible.

What follows? Is it denunciation, abandonment? Is fire summoned to go forth, and their blood mingled with their polluted sacrifices? No; it is another benison,—another burst of glorious

divine sunlight in the darkened sky ; an abrupt, unlooked-for declaration of Jehovah's own sovereign grace and mercy as the impelling cause and motive in all these wondrous dealings—"I, even I, am He that blotteth out thy transgressions for mine own sake, and will not remember thy sins" (ver. 25). Well may He utter the emphatic "I, even I." As if He had said, 'I, the God who have done so much, and who have been so basely requited ; you may well marvel at my utterances of patient love, and almost discredit their reality. Had it been your fellow-man you had thus dealt with, he would have been wearied long ago. But "I, even I" (or as more than one commentator has rendered it, "I, I alone"), the Being who "fainteth not, neither is weary," I am not yet wearied by your sins. For all this, mine anger *is* turned away, and my hand of grace and mercy and forbearance is stretched out still !'

These gracious words, then, standing in the midst of this chapter like a glad beacon of

mercy seen from a midnight sea, are doubtless specially designed to recall to us, as to Israel of old, the reason of God's loving patience, and His marvellous oblivion of guilt. This blotting out of sin is entirely an act of gratuitous, unmerited love. The pivot-words on which the verse turns are these, "*for mine own sake.*" As it is similarly expressed in a parallel passage in the Book of Ezekiel: "Say unto the House of Israel; I do not this for your sakes, O house of Israel, but for mine holy name's sake, which ye have profaned" (xxxvi. 22). His people have no claim whatever on His regard. If judgment had been laid to the line, and righteousness to the plummet,—if His ways had been as their ways, and His thoughts as their thoughts, the floods would have been left to overwhelm them, and the fires to burn up and devour; they would have been "extinct and quenched as tow," or like "the chariot and the horse, the army and the power," of a previous verse, that sank like lead in the mighty waters. But Sovereign

grace interposed; Sovereign grace procured alike a great Deliverer and a great deliverance; Sovereign grace, in the meritorious obedience and sufferings and death of a Divine Surety, has cancelled the numerous entries of guilt. It was grace which struck off the fetters from the captive Hebrews in Babylon. It was grace which formed the theme of their jubilant returning song through the wilderness (Ps. cvii.); for this is the refrain, four times repeated, of that grandest of all "Hymns of the Exile," "Oh that men would praise the Lord for His goodness, and for His wonderful works to the children of men" (vers. 8, 15, 21, 31). And when they reached Jerusalem; and the old temple under Zerubbabel began to rise, stone by stone, from its ruins,—they are beautifully represented as bringing forth the top stone with shouting; and the cry of the nation gathered at the festive scene is, "*Grace, grace* unto it!" (Zech. iv. 7.)

So it may well be with us. "We are saved by grace." Our salvation, from first to last, is "to

the praise of the glory of His grace." Our wilderness song, on the way to the true Canaan, is this—"Not unto us, O Lord, not unto us, but *unto Thy name* give glory, for Thy mercy and for Thy truth's sake." And when, with the multitudes of rejoicing Israel, we enter the gates of the new Jerusalem, on the glorious archway let us read the gleaming letters, and take them as the theme of our eternal gratitude and praise—"By the grace of God I am what I am!" O amazing thought! our transgressions blotted out,—banished from the memory of God! "I will not remember thy sins." The Books of remembrance, we are told, are on the Great Day "to be opened;" Jehovah says, 'Close them. The once blotted pages are clean; the once crowded entries are erased; the debt is discharged;—"Your sins and your iniquities will I remember no more."' A similar metaphor occurs in the second verse placed at the head of this chapter (xliv. 22), where the sins of Israel are described as "a thick cloud" (or

“dense mist,” as the words may mean). But the gentle gale of divine grace comes sweeping by, and disperses the vaporous canopy;—“I have blotted out, as a thick cloud, thy transgressions, and, as a cloud, thy sins.” Beautiful picture of pardon and forgiveness through the blood of atonement! The thick, gloomy, impenetrable cloud of our iniquities, darkening the moral firmament, screening out the sun, spreading the pallor and shadow of death over the condemned and despairing. But anon, there is a rift in that cloud. The gales of mercy, which have their mission from the cross of Jesus, have rent, like a curtain, the enshrouding gloom. The mists have dispersed, the winds have again retreated to their chambers, and left the firmament serene, mirroring in the soul the peace of God. He has said, “Peace, be still;” darkness has been changed into light, the storm into a great calm. It is this same great lesson, too, which is read in the latter verse—the *sovereignty* of divine grace.

The glory of that complete forgiveness is all God's own. "*I have blotted out*"—"I have redeemed thee!" And then immediately follows, in Isaiah's own sublime characteristic form, the song of grace to this God of Grace, giving glory to whom glory alone is due. It is one of his grandest apostrophes to dumb, inanimate nature. She is invoked, for the time, to forget her silence, and unloose her hundred tongues for the utterance of the anthem (ver. 23)—

"Sing, O ye heavens, for JEHOVAH hath done it ;
Shout ! ye lower parts of the earth !
Break forth into singing, ye mountains !
O forest, and every tree therein !
FOR THE LORD HATH REDEEMED JACOB,
AND GLORIFIED HIMSELF IN ISRAEL."

God, the blotter out of transgression, the forgiver and forgetter of sin ! We are reminded, in closing, of yet another kindred scripture, setting forth, in equally impressive figure, this same simplest, yet greatest and most wondrous of Bible truths. The simile, in this case, is *a sea* ;—not near the shore, but far beyond sight of land,

in the midst of a wide waste and wilderness of waters,—the illimitable horizon stretching on every side; and when the sounding line is let down, it cannot fathom the depth or reach the bottom. There, in the solitudes of that voiceless ocean, a plunge is heard. The surface is ruffled only for a moment; but the waves resume their wonted play—all is calm again. The load, whatever it be, is never more seen. It is buried somewhere in these dark caverns. No spirit of the deep can ever come up from the silent caves to tell its story. Ships cross and recross where it fell, but no milestone is left on the unstable highway to mark the spot. The sea can be tempted by no bribe to give up the secret of its keeping: it is lost from sight and trace and memory for ever! That is a picture of what God is willing to do to you and to me. “Thou wilt cast all their sins into the depths of the sea” (Micah vii. 19).

“Deep sea! in whose unfathomed caves,
Our sins are cast and found no more:

No tempest-rage, no surging waves,
Can beat them back upon the shore.
Low in unsounded depths they lie,
Like Egypt's submerged chivalry.

'Sing to the Lord : for He hath done
Things marvellous,' no tongue can tell :
His right hand and His arm have won
High victory for Israel !"

• • • • •
"Like the army and horse, the shield, bow, and quiver,
That slumbered deep down on the coral-paved floor,
So our legion transgressions are buried for ever :
In judgment they rise to condemn us no more :
Buried for ever,—
Evermore !"

"IN THE MULTITUDE OF MY THOUGHTS WITHIN ME
THY COMFORTS DELIGHT MY SOUL."

"Thy chief leader hath sinned (*Lowth*),
And thy interpreters (*Wordsw.*) have revolted from me.
Therefore have I profaned holy princes,
And gave up Jacob to the curse,
And Israel to blasphemies (*Delitzsch*).

And now hear, O Jacob, my servant ;
And Israel, I have chosen him :
Thus saith JEHOVAH thy creator,
And thy former from the womb, who cometh to thy help ;
Fear thou not, O my servant Jacob ;
And O Jesurun, whom I have chosen.
For I will pour out waters on thirsty ones,
And brooks upon the dry ground :
I will pour out my Spirit on thy seed,
And my blessing upon thine offspring :
And they shall spring up in the midst of the grass,
As the willows by flowing waters."

—ISAIAH xliv. 1-4.

IX.

“Comfort ye, comfort ye my people,
saith your God.”

“Fear not, O Jacob, my servant ; and thou, Jesurun, whom I have chosen. For I will pour water upon him that is thirsty, and floods upon the dry ground : I will pour my Spirit upon thy seed, and my blessing upon thine offspring : And they shall spring up as among the grass, as willows by the water-courses.”

—ISAIAH xliv, 2, 3, 4.

AGAIN light breaks in the midst of
The God of darkness.
Jeshurun.

At the close of the preceding chapter, sin had entailed its own awful retribution—*Jacob* and *Israel* were given up to “the curse” and “to reproaches.” But these two ancestral names linger like sacred notes of music in the Prophet’s ear. He proceeds to connect and associate them in a happier future, not with the curse, but with the blessing ; and again the

old refrain—the old lullaby of love, is resumed —“*Fear not.*” As Matthew Henry remarks, “God has just said, ‘I, even I, am He that blotteth out thy transgressions,’ which is the only thing that creates distance; and when that is taken away, the streams of mercy run again in their former channel.” They are streams of comfort and blessing to the Church in all ages.

Jesurun (or more properly *Jeshurun*) is a new name to us. It is supposed to be derived from a word which literally means “straight” or “even.” The symbolic meaning is therefore upright or “righteous.” St Jerome renders it “most upright.”* In the Septuagint it is translated “most beloved,”† a term of endearment. A German commentator gives it the quaint and familiar rendering of “gentleman,” or “one of gentlemanly or honourable mind” (*Delitzsch*)—a noble epithet alike for the individual or the nation. Taking it in connection with the only

* *Rectissime.*

† ἀγαπημέρος.

other two places in Scripture where the word is used, Isaiah, in employing it here, has probably reference to the primitive virtues which characterised the patriarchal ages—the faith and purity and rectitude of the old founders of the nation—those to whom Israel pointed with something of the same pride and glory as we do to our covenanting forefathers. “Moses,” we read, “was king in Jeshurun when the heads of the people and the tribes of Israel were gathered together” (Deut. xxxiii. 5), and in his final address to the congregation before his death, this is his sublime and beautiful peroration, “There is none like unto *the God of Jeshurun*, who rideth upon the heaven, in thy help, and in His excellency on the sky. The eternal God is thy refuge, and underneath are the everlasting arms : and He shall thrust out the enemy from before thee, and shall say, Destroy them ! Israel then shall dwell in safety alone : the fountain of Jacob shall be upon a land of corn and wine ; also His heavens shall drop down dew. Happy

art thou, O Israel; who is like unto thee, O people saved by the Lord, the shield of thy help, and who is the sword of thy excellency" (Deut. xxxiii. 26-29).

As "the God of Jeshurun" He speaks to us. It is under that glorious covenant-name that we are served heirs to the blessings which follow. All the spiritual seed of Israel are "upright," "righteous," through the righteousness of "the Righteous One." It is in Him alone that our feet stand in an "even place" (Ps. xxvi. 12). "Surely shall one say, In the Lord have I *righteousness* and *strength*. . . . In the Lord shall all the seed of Israel be justified and shall glory" (Isa. xlv. 24, 25). O Jeshurun! "O people" thus "saved by the Lord,"—His own sheep, called by such a name!—listen to the new words of comfort which here flow from the lips of the Shepherd of Israel.

We may regard them as containing a special promise of the outpouring of the Holy Spirit. It has been well remarked, that, "the two

clauses of verse 3 explain one another, the 'water' of the first being clearly identical with the 'spirit' of the second" (*Alexander*). "I will pour water on him that is thirsty:" . . . "I will pour my Spirit upon thy seed." "I will pour floods on the dry ground:" "I will pour my blessing upon thine offspring." The double figure is expressive of copiousness, abundance, variety (both the *water* and the *floods*), the rain from heaven and the mountain-torrents to refresh the parched land. The symbol is farther beautifully carried out in the description of the effects of this outpouring of the Spirit on the Church of God (ver. 4)—"They shall spring up as among the grass; as willows by the water-courses." These "willows by the waterbrooks" are spoken of in the book of Job as the lair or covert of Behemoth. They are seldom to be seen now beside the dry channels of desolate Palestine. If the writer may indulge in personal recollections, he can only recall them in two places—the one by the side of a turgid stream,

between the plain of Gennesaret and Safed—the other in a wild and lonely valley on the approach to Kedesh Napthali. But the willow must undoubtedly have largely mingled with the profuse and varied vegetation of the olden time. We know it contributed its part in forming the booths or tents constructed of inter-twisted branches during the Feast of Tabernacles (Lev. xxiii. 40). It was therefore a joyous festal emblem; and is prophetically suggestive of that future season of revival in the Church of God spoken of in such glowing terms by Zechariah, when the converted nations of the world shall go up to Jerusalem “from year to year to worship the King, the Lord of Hosts, and to *keep the Feast of Tabernacles*” (Zech. xiv. 16). The figure of the *festive* willows, too, may be here used in impressive contrast with those other “willows” with which Isaiah’s exile-readers were, ere long, to be sadly familiar,—on which, by the banks of the Euphrates, they were to hang the unstrung, tuneless harps of their captivity.

As the willow, of all trees, was most dependent on moisture, so is it a beautiful and appropriate emblem of the Believer and the Church, moistened and refreshed by the influences of the Holy Spirit; when He comes down "like rain upon the mown grass, and as showers that water the earth,"—causing those who in themselves are dry, sapless, dead, to become "trees of righteousness, the planting of the Lord, that He might be glorified" (Isa. lxi. 3). Our divine Redeemer Himself confirms the interpretation of this figurative language in these glorious words—"If any man thirst, let him come unto me and drink. This spake He of the Spirit, which they that believe on Him should receive" (John vii. 39). Or in the words of an apostle-commentator—"This is that which was spoken by the prophet Joel; And it shall come to pass in the last days, saith God, I will pour out of *my Spirit* upon all flesh, . . . and whosoever shall call on the name of the Lord shall be saved" (Acts ii. 16, 21).

Blessed will that season of revival and refreshment be, when, God's own time having arrived, He "will cause the shower to come down in his season : there shall be showers of blessing" (Ezek. xxxiv. 26). We have already had the drops before the shower—at the era of the Incarnation, the preaching of the Baptist, the conversions of Pentecost, the first ministry of the Apostles. But these were only foretastes,—the pledges and harbingers of yet greater abundance. Jehovah has uttered a yet unfulfilled challenge to His Church—"Prove me now herewith, saith the Lord of Hosts, if I will not open you the windows of heaven, and pour you out a blessing, that there shall not be room enough to receive it" (Mal. iii. 10). "Ask ye of the Lord rain in the time of the latter rain ; so the Lord shall make bright clouds, and give them showers of rain, to every one grass in the field" (Zech. x. 1). Very appropriate is this emblem alike of the fallen heart and the fallen world, when it is renewed, restored, beautified by the living

waters of the living Spirit. No wonder Isaiah loves frequently to adopt it, coming home, as it would do, with such impressive significance to so many in these oriental lands who knew the priceless value and blessing of water. In a parallel passage (in chap. xxxv.), the same image appears under even a more striking form. He takes there the well-known desert *mirage*, to lend an increasing power and truthfulness to his illustration; that spectral illusion being suggestive not only of the world's wilderness aspect, but of the unreal and unsatisfying pleasures with which it seeks to mock the thirst of the immortal traveller. In contrast with this are the true and satisfying joys which the gospel imparts. "The parched ground" (or as it has rather been rendered with this evident reference to the mirage)—"the glowing sand"—that which deceives the eye with a false and fictitious luxuriance—"will become a veritable pool, and the thirsty soil bubbling springs; and in the haunt of the ostrich shall spring forth the grass with

the reed, and the bulrush" (*Lowth*). Thus, under the descending rain of God's Spirit, "the wilderness and the solitary place shall be glad for them; and the desert shall rejoice, and blossom as the rose!" (xxxv. 1.)

Have we felt it so? Have we tested by experience the world's delusive pleasures, its fickle promises, and treacherous hopes; its glowing sand-pictures with imaginary palms and sparkling fountains—shadowy illusions which mock the credulous vision, and vanish on the near approach—"the fashion (the mirage) of this world passeth away!" Turning from the false and the counterfeit, have we found the true and the real? When the shadow has cruelly deceived us, have we been able to grasp the substance? Have the great aching voids of the human heart been occupied with that which alone can fill and satisfy them? Under the sublime consciousness that ours is not the transient, evanescent, airy nothing, but the glorious reality, can we say, "My flesh and my

heart faileth ; but God is the strength of my heart, and my portion for ever?" (Ps. lxxiii. 26).

"Not here ! not here ! not where the sparkling waters
Fade into mocking sands as we draw near ;
Where in the wilderness each footstep falters,
'I shall be satisfied '—but oh ! not here.

Not here—where all the dreams of bliss deceive us,
Where the worn spirit never gains its goal ;
Where, haunted ever by the thoughts that grieve us,
Across us floods of bitter memory roll.

There is a land where every pulse is thrilling
With rapture earth's sojourners may not know,
Where Heaven's repose the weary heart is stilling,
And peacefully life's time-tossed currents flow.

Thither my weak and weary steps are tending ;
Saviour and Lord ! with Thy frail child abide ;
Guide me toward Home, where, all my wandering ending,
I shall see THEE, and 'shall be satisfied !'"

"IN THE MULTITUDE OF MY THOUGHTS WITHIN ME
THY COMFORTS DELIGHT MY SOUL."

*"For I will pour out waters on thirsty ones,
And brooks upon the dry ground :*

*One shall say, To JEHOVAH I belong ;
And another shall be called by the name of Jacob ;
And another shall inscribe his hand to JEHOVAH (Lowth),
And name the name of Israel with honour (Delitzsch).
Thus saith JEHOVAH, the King of Israel,
And His Redeemer, JEHOVAH of Hosts,
I am the first, and I am the last ;
And beside me there is no God."*

—ISAIAH xliv. 3, 5, 6

X.

*“Comfort ye, comfort ye my people,
saith your God.”*

“For I will pour water upon him that is thirsty, and floods upon the dry ground : I will pour my Spirit upon thy seed, and my blessing upon thine offspring. . . . One shall say, I am the Lord’s ; and another shall call himself by the name of Jacob ; and another shall subscribe with his hand unto the Lord, and surname himself by the name of Israel.”

—ISAIAH xliv. 3-5.

**Consecra-
tion.** THE figurative language taken from outer nature—its rain-torrents and brooks of the valley, its grass and willows, is suddenly changed for another symbol, equally expressive.

The Prophet looks down the vista of ages to a season of remarkable revival in the Church. One after another, here and there, throughout the wide world, is heard shouting aloud his

allegiance to the great King, and subscribing the covenant charter. Ver. 5 recalls a kindred passage in the beautiful 87th Psalm, where it is said of the City of God in her millennial glory, "*This and that man* was born in her. . . . The Lord shall count, when He writeth up the people, that *this man* was born there" (vers. 5, 6). It is the same word here employed. "*One* shall say," and *another*, and *another*, and *another*. We may picture the Prophet standing on his watch-tower in the Holy City. He hears in the distance a lonely voice: it exclaims, "I belong to Jehovah" (or, 'For Jehovah am I'*)—His dedicated, covenanted, consecrated one. He listens again: from another quarter comes in the confession, "I call myself by the name of Jacob:"—once a hated name to me—a term of reproach; now I exult in it, and glory in it. He listens again: another voice is heard saying, "I subscribe with my hand unto Jehovah;" or, as that

* Barnes. See also Bishop Wordsworth on this passage.

has been rendered by Bishop Lowth, "I inscribe my hand unto Jehovah." As slaves, by means of stains and punctures, inscribed on their skin the name of their master; as soldiers punctured on their arms the name of their commander; as idol-worshippers had branded on them the name of their deity;—so does the votary of the true God inscribe, by word, and deed, and sacramental vow, the all-glorious Name of Jehovah; saying, like Paul, "God, whose I am, and whom I serve;" or again, when he asserts, in reference to the same custom of branding on the flesh the name of the superior, "I bear on my body the marks (the brand) of the Lord Jesus."* Once more the Prophet listens, and yet another voice is heard, "I surname myself by the name of Israel:" 'I desire to bear the surname and wear the livery of God's redeemed people;—to be identified with them in espousing

* See the entire passage in Lowth, where he quotes from Procopius—"Many (Christians) marked their wrists or their arms with the sign of the cross or the name of Christ."

His cause and extending His kingdom;—permitted thus to inherit the blessings uttered of old by Jacob to Ephraim and Manasseh, in the name of a greater than the dying patriarch—“Let my name be named on them, and the name of my fathers Abraham and Isaac” (Gen. xlviii. 16).

Beautiful and impressive picture of the Church of Christ in its latter day of glory! Voices from every quarter of the habitable globe swelling the hosannah which is to welcome the Son of God to the throne of universal empire. It is, as it were, a glorious ‘solemn league and covenant’ subscribed from among all the nations; one after another shouting the watchword of Zion’s world-wide brotherhood, “I am Jehovah’s.” One voice is heard in the distant east; it rises from the plains of India, or amid the teeming millions of China and Japan. Another; it is from a dweller in the desert rocks, or from among the wandering tents of Kedar. Another; it is the slave of Africa, or its once blood-thirsty

cannibal ; or the negro of Ethiopia, stretching out his hands unto God. Another ; it is from the inhabitants of the frigid zone, where, enthroned in icebergs, winter sways his perpetual sceptre. Another ; it is from the isles of the sea, or from the midst of primeval forests or Australian pasturages. Another ; it is from the crowded mart,—a voice from the “loud stunning tide of human care and crime” in the world’s dense capitals. But the one theme of universal homage is, “To Jehovah I belong :” “Crown Him ;” and yet another, and another, and another still, from all the varying crowds and climes of humanity, swell the strain of joyous adoration, “Crown Him ! crown Him ! crown Him Lord of all !”

And who can doubt, from ver. 6, that it is Messiah who is here spoken of. He calls Himself “Redeemer, the Lord of Hosts.” Nay, farther, He appropriates the very name which He afterwards assumes in the latest revelation of Himself and of His glory, “I am the *first*,

and I am the *last*”—“I am Alpha and Omega, the *beginning* and the *ending*, which is, and which was, and which is to come, the *Almighty*” (Rev. i. 8). Nor, in that jubilant coronation hymn—that loud ascription from every tribe and tongue and people and nation, must we forget the voices of those who, for long centuries of blinded alienation, have withheld their tribute of homage to the Messiah-Redeemer, but who will then be ready as the others, to join in the anthem, and, as the children of Zion, to be joyful in their King. The true offspring of the patriarch, exulting alike in their natural and spiritual pedigree, will at last glory in identifying themselves with Christ and His people, calling themselves “by the name of Jacob,” and subscribing the oath of allegiance, “To Jehovah-Jesus we belong.” On this interesting view of the subject, however, we shall not now enlarge; but rather reserve it for fuller treatment in a future exposition. Enough at present to say, that the spiritual does not by any means ex-

clude the literal meaning and fulfilment of the promise, "Fear not, O Jacob, my servant; and thou, Jeshurun, whom I have chosen; . . . I will pour my Spirit upon thy seed, and my blessing upon thine offspring!"

Who will not pray for that coming and that kingdom? O Saviour-God! hasten the time when multitudes shall deem it an honour to have Thy mark on their foreheads, and to swear fealty to Thy cause; when men shall be blessed in Thee, all nations call Thee blessed; and when the recorded prayer of now scattered and dispersed Israel shall ascend, and not ascend in vain—"Save us, O Lord our God, and gather us from among the heathen to give thanks unto Thy holy name, and to triumph in Thy praise. Blessed be the Lord God of Israel, from everlasting to everlasting" (Ps. cvi. 47).

But while the words refer, in their more extended and unfulfilled sense to nations, let us not omit their present and individual application to ourselves. As believers, called by the name of

Christians, do we feel our responsibilities as those who have inscribed their hand to Jehovah, and surnamed themselves with the name of Israel? The hand being the working member, the inscription on it is the symbol of consecration of heart and soul. "Soldier of God!" have I any claim to the honourable appellation? Have I realised all that is involved in that vow of allegiance which Bunyan describes as uttered by the man in armour at the gate, "Put my name down, sir, for I too am to be one of the host of the Lord?"

Reader, in order that you may be "Christ's faithful soldier and servant," it is not necessary that you be among the number of those who are vindicating His cause on the high places of the field, in posts of conspicuous and distinguished honour. Your apportioned lot and duty may be the reverse. It may rather be, keeping solitary vigil in some obscure watch-tower. It may be in the nightly bivouac of sorrow, with sword and shield hung in the silent

corridors of sickness; by passive endurance rather than by active service, you may be called to glorify His name. It may be, wearing the consistent profession, and bearing the consistent cross in the midst of the daily contacts and cares and obloquies of life. "To every man his work;" to every soldier his post; to every Levite his "course;" whether it be the more privileged occupations of the Holy Place, or the subordinate sphere of hewing wood and drawing water. And remember, too, that the lowliest offices,—even menial drudgery, may be transfigured into what is holy and religious, if in the discharge of these duties you are actuated and animated by pure and holy motive and principle; seeking to carry out the lofty rule and test of the Apostle, "*Whatsoever* ye do, whether in word or in deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus." Be your assigned place and mission what they may, seek to make it manifest, by deed as well as by word, that "to Jehovah you belong." The life of the Christian is, or ought to be, a

life of consecration;—bearing the image and superscription of the Great Master who has redeemed it. “Ye are not your own; ye are bought with a price; wherefore glorify God in your body and in your spirit, which are His.”

“Jesus, Master, whose I am,
Purchased Thine alone to be,
By Thy blood, O spotless Lamb,
Shed so willingly for me;
Let my heart be all Thine own,
Let me live to Thee alone.

Lord, Thou needest not, I know,
Service such as I can bring;
Yet I long to give and show
Loyal homage to my King;
Open Thou mine eyes to see
All the work Thou hast for me.”

Nor let us degrade this high consecration “to the Lord” by confounding it with any travesties of human invention. Let us not mistake adhesion to sect and party, for allegiance and loyalty to the divine Redeemer. Amid the battle of creeds and din of faction; when ten thousand clamorous voices are heard proclaiming, “To this or to that ecclesiastical organisa-

tion I belong,"—be it ours to avow a nobler ownership and surrender;—answering to the roll-call of Jehovah's true servants, not by any conventional Shibboleths, but by lofty principle and high-toned consistency, by self-sacrifice, holiness of heart and purity of life. Paul's badge is the only safe and legitimate one—"Be ye followers of me, even as I (or as far as I) also am of Christ" (1 Cor. xi. 1).

Let us only recall, in closing, the great truth which imparts to the passage we have been considering its main beauty and significance; that this consecration of the soul is the special result and product of the Holy Spirit's quickening, reviving, regenerating power. For it is when God, in fulfilment of His own gracious promise, "pours water on thirsty ones, and floods upon the dry ground," that grass springs up on the parched earth, and the willows fringe the water-courses; or, using the other metaphor, that the altar is reared and the vow of allegiance is recorded.

Spirit of the living God! descend, in all the plenitude of Thy gifts and graces, alike on "Thy holy Church throughout all the world," and on each individual heart. Then "the parched ground shall become a pool, and the thirsty land springs of water." "There is a river, the streams whereof shall make glad the city of God" (Ps. xlv. 4). "And everything shall live whither the river cometh" (Ezek. xlvii. 9).

Spirit Divine! grant us Thy gracious leadings;
Come and erect Thy dwelling in each soul;
And while before Thee rise our fervent pleadings,
Touch every lip with a live altar-coal.

Come, like the gentle dove, with olive-token;
Come, like the balmy wind, soft breathing peace;
Come to the heart which sin has crushed and broken;
Come to the captive, and vouchsafe release.

Come, like the dew which on Mount Hermon falleth;
Come, when bereavement dims the mourner's eye;
Come, when 'the deep to deep' responsive calleth,
And with Thy comforts gem our starless sky.

Come to the world, new life and healing bringing,
Cheer its parched souls with rills of heavenly bliss;
Make them like willows by the water springing,
'The Lord's own planting'—'Trees of righteousness.'

"IN THE MULTITUDE OF MY THOUGHTS WITHIN ME
THY COMFORTS DELIGHT MY SOUL."



“Thus saith JEHOVAH to His anointed,
To Cyrus, whom I have taken by his right hand,
To tread down before him nations ;
And the loins of kings I will loose,
To open before him the folding-doors (*Barnes*) ;
And the gates shall not be shut ;
I will go before thee,
And make the high places level (*Barnes*).
The valves of brass will I break in sunder,
And the bars of iron will I hew down (*Lowth*).

I will gird thee, though thou hast not known me ;
That they may know from the rising of the sun,
And his going down, that there is none without me.
I am JEHOVAH, and there is none else,
Forming light, and creating darkness ;
Founder of peace, and creator of evil.
I JEHOVAH am the author of all these things.
Drop down, ye heavens, the dew from above,
And let the blue sky rain down righteousness (*Delitzsch*),
Let the earth open her bosom, and let salvation blossom,
And righteousness, let them sprout together.

I have not spoken in secret, in a dark place of the earth :
I have not said to the seed of Jacob, In vain seek me :
I am JEHOVAH, speaking truth, proclaiming rectitude.

Look unto me, and be ye saved.”

—ISAIAH xlv. 1, 2, 5-8, 19, 22.

XI.

“Comfort ye, comfort ye my people,
saith your God.”

“Look unto me, and be ye saved.”

—ISAIAH xlv. 22.

WE have, in the opening of this
Salvation. chapter, vividly described to us the
victories of Cyrus, the renowned hero of Persia ;
in his whirlwind career, subduing the nations
before him, loosing the loins of kings (that
whole troop of vassal empires enumerated by
Xenophon), and opening before him the hun-
dred brazen gates of Babylon (also minutely
described by Herodotus, as guarding alike the
approaches to the river and the temple of
Belus), and cutting in sunder the bars of iron.

The spoil amassed on that occasion was probably unexampled in the annals of war; for besides the enormous wealth of palatial Babylon itself, it included the fabulous riches of Croesus, king of Lydia, who brought waggon-load after waggon-load to lay at the feet of the conqueror. The aggregate was computed to be equivalent to upwards of a hundred and twenty-six millions of our money. Well, therefore, might the Prophet here chronicle, among the predestined exploits of this mighty prince (ver. 3), "the treasures of darkness, and hidden riches of secret places."*

. Need we say, that Cyrus was here the figure of a Greater that was to come—the true anointed King, the great Shepherd of the nations—whose special mission, as we shall find in a subsequent portion of the prophecy, was "to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the

* See for full particulars Barnes and Lowth, Smith's Bib. Dic., &c.

prison to them that are bound;" at whose summons, with a grander spiritual meaning—

"Asunder burst the gates of brass,
The iron fetters fall;
And gladsome light and liberty,
Are straight secured to all."

And not only, in these His spiritual conquests, did He "lead captivity captive," but He "received gifts for men." The hoarded treasures of darkness have been exhumed. In the phraseology of His own expressive parable—He came upon the strong man armed, taking from him all his armour wherein he trusted, and divided his spoils (Luke xi. 21, 22). Not only has the citadel fallen, but all its magazines and treasures—His own unsearchable riches, which were pillaged and alienated by the usurper, have been reclaimed for behoof of His ransomed people.

It is this great and glorious Antitype who speaks in the passage we are now to consider. Indeed the words in ver. 23 are specially applied to Christ by the Apostle Paul, in Rom. xiv. 11. There, speaking of Jesus as "Lord both of the

dead and the living," and of His judgment-seat, at which we shall all stand, he adds, "For it is written, As I live, saith the Lord, every knee shall bow to me, and every tongue shall confess to God." In ver. 20, it is said of the heathen, "They pray to a God that *cannot* save." The answer—the antiphonal strain—comes in the words of the text—"I will tell you," as if the Divine Speaker said, 'of one who *can* save,' "Look unto ME, and be ye saved."

We may profitably glance, in the present and in the following exposition, at a few of the characteristics of this salvation which are suggested and unfolded in the chapter. In doing so, let this be the thought uppermost as we meditate upon the august theme, The salvation—"the redemption of the soul, is precious" (Ps. xlix. 8).

It is a *Simple* salvation. We mean by that, that it is plain, clear, distinct, intelligible in its terms. It is, in this respect, unlike the false

religions referred to in ver. 19, whose utterances, being involved in designed obscurity and ambiguity, are there represented as "spoken in secret, and in dark places of the earth." Such were the dubious responses which came from the Delphic oracle, the Cave at Lebadea, the Cumean Sybil, the Eleusinian Ceres, the sooth-sayers and necromancers of Egypt, Phœnicia, and Persia:—those voices the poet of "Paradise Lost" describes, which—

"With hideous hum,
Ran through the archèd roof with words deceiving." *

The salvation of the gospel, on the other hand, is so clear and perspicuous that "he who runs may read." The untutored savage, or the lisping child on its mother's knee, may listen to and understand its divine simplicity—"Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved" (Acts xvi. 31). It also clears up all perplexing theories with which the heathen bewildered

* Milton's Hymn on the Nativity.

themselves as to the unity of the divine Being. The belief promulgated by Zoroaster and the Persian Magi (and to which there is reference in ver. 7) was, that there were two supreme, co-ordinate, co-eternal, yet antagonist principles which ruled the world; the one, the author of all good, the other, the author of all evil; the one, the representative of light, the other of darkness.* 'I,' says Jehovah, 'am the author of both. This apparent conflict and duality of principles is explained and reconciled in the cross of my Son.' Ver. 6, "*I am the Lord, and there is none else: I form the light and create darkness, I the Lord (Jehovah) do all these things.*"

Again, it is a *Free* salvation; not only clear and unambiguous in its terms, but uncumbered and unconditioned in its offers. What are these? "*Look and live!*" "*Look unto me!*"

* See Wordsworth's Notes on the entire passage, with References.

There is no costly, protracted, elaborate preparation or probation needed. No painful penances; no rites, no fastings, no lustrations, no priestly absolutions. In ver. 13, God says of Cyrus (and He says the same in a nobler sense of a Greater than the earthly liberator), "He shall let go my captives, *not for price nor reward*, saith the Lord of Hosts." This is not, indeed, after the manner of men, nor in accordance with that natural legality of spirit which loves to fetter itself with conditions and terms. If the Prophet had bid the Syrian leper of old "do some great thing;" if he had imposed on him some services, or prescribed some arduous pilgrimages; if he had exacted some toilsome labour, or demanded some costly tribute—Naa-man would have cordially assented; but he could not brook the trifling expedient of dipping himself in the river Jordan; he turns disdainfully away.

"Oh how unlike the complex works of man,
Heaven's easy, artless, unencumbered plan!

.

It stands, like the cerulean arch we see,
Majestic in its own simplicity.
Inscribed above the portal, from afar
Conspicuous, as the brightness of a star,
Legible only by the light they give,
Stand the soul-quickenings words, '*Believe and live !*'"

Again, it is a *Righteous* salvation (ver. 19) "I the Lord speak righteousness;" or, in the still more striking assertion (the gospel assertion) which follows (ver. 21), "a just God and a Saviour;" reminding us of St Paul's expanded paraphrase, "To declare . . . His righteousness, that He might be just and the Justifier" (Rom. iii. 26). It is a salvation which has been secured in accordance with the principles of everlasting truth and everlasting rectitude. It is Jesus lifted up on the cross (as the atoning Sacrifice for sin, to pay the penalty demanded by God's outraged law), and with His loving hands extended as if to embrace a world, who says, "Look unto me, and be ye saved;" "I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto me." Let us not, however, misinterpret the relation of justice

to mercy, as if between these two divine attributes there existed any antagonism,—as if they represented two conflicting principles (similar to the Magian), one of which had to be propitiated before the other could exercise its benignant will, or go forth on its benignant behests. Nay, they are in perfect harmony. Love can hold out her blissful sceptre only when standing by the throne of justice. In that glorious salvation, every attribute of the divine nature has been magnified and made honourable. “Mercy and truth are met together, righteousness and peace have kissed each other” (Ps. lxxxv. 10). In a beautiful kindred simile, in ver. 8 of this chapter, the Prophet invokes the bright firmament above him to endorse the same assurance—“Drop down,” says he, “ye heavens, from above, and let the skies pour down *righteousness*,” and then, earth is represented as opening her locked bosom to receive the fructifying shower,—this again issuing in a harvest of righteousness and salvation—“Let the earth open, and let them

bring forth salvation, and let righteousness spring up together."

Again, it is a *Sure* salvation. The rites of the heathen leave their votaries in uncertainty, groping in the dark. "Their idols are silver and gold, the work of men's hands. . . . They that make them are like unto them; so is every one that trusteth in them" (Ps. cxv. 4, 8). Their feelings and experiences are well described in ver. 16, "They shall be ashamed and also confounded all of them; they shall go to confusion together." While, in impressive and sublime contrast with this, Jehovah avows in ver. 23, "I have sworn by myself: the word" or 'truth' (*Lowth*) "is gone out of my mouth in righteousness;" and in ver. 19, "I said not unto the seed of Jacob, Seek ye Me in vain;" or ver. 17, "Ye shall *not* be ashamed nor confounded." Truly the covenant of grace is a covenant "well ordered in all things, and *sure*." For the sake of His people, God here, as else-

where, has confirmed the immutability of His counsel by an oath, in order that He may give us "strong consolation." Accommodating Himself to human language, He stakes His own Immutable Being for the certain fulfilment of His sayings. His hand is never shortened, His ear is never heavy; He is never, like the sleeping Baal of Carmel, deaf to the cries of His people, mocking them with silence, deluding them with lies. We can write under every promise of the great redemption, "Thy word is very sure, therefore Thy servant loveth it"—"*Surely* His salvation is nigh them that fear Him" (Ps. lxxxv. 9).

Is this stable salvation ours,—with all its guaranteed and inalienable blessings, the inviolable gifts and pledges of "God that cannot lie,"—resulting in a present peace, "not as the world giveth," and in a hope that "maketh not ashamed?" How many are risking their eternal safety on what may be called the mere accidents and conventionalisms of the religious life;—on creed and dogma and party; how many others

are making a confidence of their own good name and fair average reputation and righteousness; looking *to* themselves for a subjective ground of trust, instead of *out* of themselves to the objective ground here spoken of, "Look unto *Me!*" Blessed, on the other hand, are those to whom God has shown "His marvellous loving-kindness in a strong city," that city in which *salvation* has been appointed "for walls and for bulwarks;" who, driven from all earthly stays and shelters, are enabled to say, with their feet on the only sure foundation—

"On Christ, the solid rock, I stand,
All other grounds are sinking sand;
Trembling with guilt, oppressed with fear,
Unfailing refuge I have here.
Long have I roamed in want and pain,
Long have I sought for rest in vain;
'Wildered in doubt, in darkness lost,
My soul fierce driven and tempest-tost.
But forth from dark and stormy sky,
Beneath Thy sheltering cross I fly;
There I repose with fears all fled,
Pardoned, accepted, comforted.

The present, peace ; the past, forgiven ;
The future—vista-views of heaven.
All that I need in Thee I find,
Thou Great Redeemer of mankind !”

“ IN THE MULTITUDE OF MY THOUGHTS WITHIN ME
THY COMFORTS DELIGHT MY SOUL.”

"Thus saith JEHOVAH, The wealth of Egypt, and the merchandise of Ethiopia,
 And the Sabeans, men of stature,
 Shall come over to thee, and be thine :
 They will come after thee ; in chains shall they come,
 They shall bow down before thee, and in suppliant posture
 (say),
 God is in thee alone,
 And there is none else—no deity at all.
 Verily, Thou art a mysterious God (*Delitzsch*),
 O God of Israel, the Saviour.

But Israel shall be saved by JEHOVAH with everlasting
 salvation :
 Ye shall not be ashamed, and ye shall not be confounded to
 everlasting eternities (*Delitzsch*).

A just God, and bringing salvation ; there is none beside me.
Turn round unto me, and be saved, all the ends of the earth.
 (*Alexander*).

Surely to me shall every knee bow, shall every tongue swear ;
 Saying, Only to JEHOVAH belongeth salvation and power"
 (*Lowth*).

—ISAIAH xlv. 14, 15, 17, 21-24.

XII.

“Comfort ye, comfort ye my people,
saith your God.”

“Look unto me, and be ye saved, all the ends of the earth.”

—ISAIAH xlv. 22.

Salvation IN the preceding exposition, we
to the Ends drew attention to a few character-
of the Earth. istics of the great Gospel Salvation,
as these are sketched and outlined in the 45th
chapter of the prophecy. We were there re-
minded of it as a *simple* salvation, a *free* salva-
tion, a *righteous* salvation, and a *sure* salvation.
The suggested and suggestive points, however,
are not yet exhausted. Let us proceed to notice
two others. Although, as in the case of those
already remarked upon, they must be little
more than indicated—not expanded.

I would observe, then, that it is here farther unfolded to us as the *Only* salvation. Ver. 24, "*In the Lord*" (in none other) "have I righteousness and strength;" or, as Bishop Lowth renders it, "Only to Jehovah belongeth salvation and power." "Neither is there salvation in any other" (Acts iv. 12). Reject this method of redemption, and there is no other "sacrifice for sin." Cut off this bridge of safety, and the gulph can in no other way be spanned;—"LORD, save me, (else) I perish!" On the night of the exodus, the Hebrews, in the frenzy of mingled unbelief and despair, might have attempted to uprear gigantic walls like those to which their eyes were habituated in Egypt, in order to screen out the destroying angel: but in vain; nothing else but the appointed blood-sprinkling on the lintel can avail to save them. In the wilderness of Paran, when their camp, owing to the plague of the serpents, is converted into a scene of wailing, some wounded Israelite, affecting to spurn the appointed method of cure,

might attempt to go back to the physicians of Egypt, and the magical arts of her sorcerers. If he did so, it would be infallibly to perish. The desert would become his grave, and the white drifting sand his winding-sheet. It is 'Look to that brazen serpent, and live! Refuse to look, and die!' Naaman may prefer the rushing streams of his own Abana and Pharpar, to the river of Israel; but with all their wealth of waters, they cannot cure him. The man-slayer may flee, for greater safety, to some of the strong fortress-cities which crowned the mountain heights of Palestine, rather than to the defenceless ones appointed in the plain: if he did so, he became the certain victim of the Goel's sword. How many there are still, who, going about seeking to establish their own righteousness, refuse to submit themselves to the righteousness of God; clutching at some straws and driftwood, instead of laying hold of the free, full, complete salvation offered to them in Christ. "There is none other name under

heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved."

"All for sin can not atone,
THOU must save, and THOU ALONE."

Once more, it is an *Eternal* salvation (ver. 17) — "But Israel shall be saved in the Lord with an *everlasting* salvation" (or, 'with the salvation of ages,' or 'eternities'); and again, "Ye shall not be ashamed nor confounded *world without end*" (ver. 17); words which, it has been remarked, were probably in the divine thoughts of our adorable Redeemer when, as the Great Shepherd of His flock, He says in His Judgment-day parable, "These shall go away into everlasting punishment, but the righteous *into life eternal*." 'An eternal salvation,' a salvation '*for everlasting ages!*' Who can take in, at a glance, the magnificent reality,—the outlook from our little watchtower of earth on this illimitable sea of bliss? To think that when millions of years, ay, and of millenniums, shall have passed into the infinite future, these will

be but the birthday—the instalment of an endless existence—that existence commensurate with the lifetime of the Eternal God! The charter bestowed at the foot of the cross confers not a lease, but an everlasting freehold. “The righteous” are to be “righteous still;” “the holy” are to be “holy still.” There are no descending, no lengthening shadows on Heaven’s dial: “the sun shall no more go down.” Well may the apostle, when he speaks of it, call this “*so great salvation!*” (Heb. ii. 3). Its priceless blessings are “a well of water springing up into *everlasting* life.”

One other clause, in these comprehensive verses, still claims a closing word, and from Isaiah’s standpoint that clause is a remarkable one. For it answers the query, To whom speaks the Prophet in this chapter, when he declares in ver. 17, “*Israel* shall be saved in the Lord with an everlasting salvation?” Is it those Hebrew captives in Babylon alone who are to take down

their silent harps, and sing their triumphant song? Is it for them alone, and their natural descendants, that these skies, in lofty poetry, are here represented as "dropping down righteousness?" No—that jubilee trumpet sends its notes echoing round the world—"Look unto me, and be ye saved, *all the ends of the earth.*" Accordingly, in one of the most striking and beautiful verses of the chapter, men of all kingdoms (and the noblest specimens of human kind), are described as coming to do fealty and obeisance to the Messiah (ver. 14)—"Thus saith the Lord, the labour of Egypt, and merchandise of Ethiopia, and of the Sabeans, men of stature, shall come over unto thee, and they shall be thine: they shall come after thee. In chains they shall come over, and they shall fall down unto thee, they shall make supplication unto thee, saying, Surely God is in thee." As captive kings and prisoners of war, in ancient times, were wont to follow in chains the car of victory, and grace the conqueror's triumph; so

these special nations are, by a well-known poetical figure, taken as representatives of earth's diverse peoples, coming, as willing vassals, in the chains of loyal love and devoted obedience, to swell the triumph of the Prince of Peace! The prophetic picture is what is elsewhere called "the fulness of the Gentiles." It is the Gospel's silent principle of power, "the power of God unto salvation" dominating over all the other 'powers' which had for ages ruled the world. "In chains they shall come over, and fall down before thee."

Let us imagine the magnificent train;—the kings who are to be the fathers, and the queens who are to be the nursing mothers of the Church. "The kings of Tarshish and of the isles shall bring presents: the kings of Sheba and Seba shall offer gifts" (Ps. lxxii. 10). "I have sworn by myself," says the divine Speaker, in words already commented upon, "to me every knee shall bow, every tongue shall swear." There will be a universal recognition

of Messiah's sovereignty. He, the antitypical Cyrus, will, in a truer than their primary application, "unloose the loins of kings." The royal "cincture," the badge of kingship, will be ungirded; they will own, by the significant act, their allegiance and servitude to the King of kings. Representatives of deserted altars and abandoned superstitions, too, will join the loyal throng. There will be the once fire worshippers of Persia, the demon worshippers of Polynesia; there will be the child of Islam who has forsaken his mosque or wēly, the Bushman the mud god of his kraäl, the Indian of the Far West who has turned his back for ever on the cannibal feast of his idol; there will be the self-torturing devotees of Buddhism from China and Burmah; there will be the votaries of bloodthirsty Brahma and Vishnu, Siva and Kali, from Hindostan, those who erewhile would have offered themselves as victims in the wild orgies of Juggernaut, now hastening to welcome the chariot of the Anointed Saviour. Above all,

there will be the Jew, the millions on millions of 'tribes of the wandering foot,' abandoning the obdurate and defiant scepticism of ages, who will take their part, too, in the great coronation anthem—

“Lift up the everlasting gates,
The doors wide open fling,
Enter, ye nations who obey
The statutes of our King.”

Yes, in a nobler sense than was the case with Cyrus, “the gates of brass and bars of iron” will yield to His might, and the world’s treasure-cities, its palaces and temples, its shrines and pagodas, its homes and households, with all their priceless aggregate of deathless souls, will be captured at His will and redeemed for His glory. It will be the blissful fulfilment of the words in that great prophetic Psalm which is so peculiarly His own—“All the ends of the world shall remember, and turn unto the Lord ; and all the kindreds of the nations shall worship before thee” (Ps. xxii. 27).

Can we take part—have we already taken part, in this magnificent ovation and welcome? Are we now “looking unto Jesus?” looking to Him with the simple eye of faith;—“turning round” (as the word means) from everything else, that we may rest on Him alone, as *all* our salvation and all our desire?—“looking to Him *from* everything, looking to Him *in* everything, looking to Him *for* everything.” While others are spoken of here, as being “ashamed and confounded all of them,” can it be said of *us*, “They looked unto Him, and were lightened; and their faces were *not* ashamed?” (Ps. xxxiv. 5). Nor, if we are thus among “the saved” ourselves, can we rest satisfied with the possession of these spiritual privileges and blessings, without longing for the time when “all the ends of the earth” shall participate in the boon:—when Jew and Greek, Barbarian, Scythian, bond and free, shall join in that loud acclaim which is to welcome the Messiah-King to the throne of universal empire!

“Can we whose souls are lighted
With wisdom from on high ;
Can we to man benighted,
The lamp of truth deny ?

Salvation, O salvation,
The joyful sound proclaim,
Till earth's remotest nation
Has learnt Messiah's name.

Waft, waft ye winds His story,
And you, ye waters, roll,
Till, like a sea of glory,
It spreads from pole to pole.

And o'er our ransomed nature
The Lamb for sinners slain,
Redeemer, King, Creator,
In bliss returns to reign.”

“IN THE MULTITUDE OF MY THOUGHTS WITHIN ME
THY COMFORTS DELIGHT MY SOUL.”

“Bel sinketh down, Nebo croucheth ;
Their images are carried on the beasts of burden, and draught
cattle (*Delitzsch*) :
Their litters are laden : a grievous burden to the weary beast.
They stoop ; they bow down together ;
They cannot save the load (*Alexander*) ;
Even they themselves are gone into captivity.
Hearken unto me, O House of Jacob,
And all the remnant of the House of Israel,
Ye that have been borne by me from the birth,
Ye that have been carried from the mother's lap :
And even to your old age I am the same ;
*And to grey hair I shall bear you on the shoulder (*Delitzsch*) :*
I have done it ; and I will carry,
I will carry and will deliver you.”

—ISAIAH xlv. 1-4.

XIII.

**"Comfort ye, comfort ye my people,
saith your God."**

**"And even to your old age I am He : and even to hoar hairs
will I carry you : I have made, and I will bear ; even I
will carry, and will deliver you."**

—ISAIAH xlv. 4.

Old Age **WE** have here another example
Comforted. of Isaiah's contrasted passages.
"Carry" and "bear" are the two
emphatic words singled out for this antithesis.
The idols of Babylon are, in the opening verse
of the chapter, represented as being "carried
away" as spoil from the conquered city : they
are piled on the backs of camels and horses,
dromedaries and elephants, and these beasts of
burden are described as groaning under the load.
The gold and silver images, the tutelary deities

of Chaldea, which should have proved the guardians of the city and the defence of the besieged, are themselves borne along by panting teams in the enemies' caravans (ver. 1)—“Their idols were upon the beasts of burden, and upon the draught cattle: your carriages (or litters) were heavy laden: they are a burden to the weary beasts.” ‘Not so,’ says Jehovah, in ver. 3, “O House of Jacob, and ye remnant of the House of Israel.” Not so is it with the God *you* serve. These dumb idols cannot ‘carry’ their votaries. They have themselves to be ‘carried.’ *But*, “*I* will ‘*carry*’ *you*.” *I have* carried you “from the womb:” “and even to hoar hairs will I carry you: I have made, and I will bear; even I will carry, and will deliver you.”

These words bring God before us, under the new but beautiful and tender image of a father bearing in his arms the child he loves. It is a repetition of the same emblem employed by Moses, in his wilderness address to Israel: “Thou hast seen how that the Lord thy God

bare thee, as a man doth bear his son, in all the way that ye went" (Deut. i. 31). We have a kindred image in the prophecies of Hosea, where Ephraim is represented, first as a little child, a tender infant, and Jehovah dealing with him as such. "I taught Ephraim also to go, taking them by their arms" (Hosea xi. 3). As the babe is, by and by, no longer carried in arms, but put in leading-strings, to accustom it to walk; so God is, in the same passage, represented as conducting His children from stage to stage, alike in the natural and spiritual life—"I drew them with cords of a man, with bands of love" (ver. 4). But the picture here is fuller and more comprehensive still. It is the delineation of His unwavering covenant faithfulness—not in infancy or manhood only, but extending from the cradle to the grave—from the smiles of the lisping babe to the hoar hairs of old age,—when, lapsing into second childhood, tender nursing is again required. "Even to your old age," says He, "I am He"

[or rather, "I am the same"] (*Lowth*). Indeed the comparison of parental affection falls short of the reality. The care of the earthly parent is diminished or withdrawn on the approach of manhood;—the same tender solicitude is not needed, as in the helpless period of infancy. Moreover, in the case of the parent, advancing years and infirmities too often frustrate and forbid former efforts of love; while many are left fatherless and motherless, to pursue their solitary unbefriended way. Not so 'our Father in heaven:'—no weakness, no infirmity paralyses His arm. From the hour of birth to the hour of death, it is one unbroken ministry of paternal kindness.

Of the temples of Babylon it is here said, "Bel boweth down, Nebo stoopeth." These were the two great deities of Chaldea. The temple of Bel (Belus, or Baal), with its spiral colossal tower, on the right bank of the Euphrates, and its statue of gold twelve cubits high, was one of the wonders of the world. It was

supposed to be erected for the worship of the planet Jupiter; while Nebo was the golden image which represented Mercury, the planet which was imagined in their mythology to be the attendant scribe or 'recorder' of the more brilliant orb, ever busy registering the phenomena of the heavens above, and the events of the earth beneath.* Both these idols and their lordly temples have fallen. What is left of them has become the haunt and home of the bittern and cormorant, and all doleful creatures. In bootless attempts to identify the site of

* In our own British Museum there is a remarkable stone—a block of black basalt in ten columns, with the cuneiform character, on which the following is part of an inscription extending to 620 lines :—"Nebuchodonosor, the King of Babylon, the supreme lord, the adorer of *Nebo*. I have restored the sanctuaries of the god. For Merodach is the great god, who created me; and *Nebo* his son sustains my royalty, and I have always exalted the worship of his august divinity. Nebo, the guardian of the hosts of heaven and earth, has committed to me the sceptre of justice to govern men."—*Quoted by Bishop Wordsworth, in loco.*

Bel and Nebo are familiar compounds of the names of the chief Babylonian kings, such as Bel-shazzar, Nebo-chadnezzar, &c.—*See Smith's Dictionary.*

what once "reached unto heaven" (Gen. xi. 4), travellers can only state the competing claims of unsightly mounds on which the roving Arab pitches his tent. But "the Lord liveth." While the visible temples have "bowed down" and become a mass of humiliating ruin, the Invisible God ever lives and loves; lives as a Father, loves as a Father:—"Even to your old age I am He!"—the same.

It is the believer "well stricken in years,"—he whose "hoary head is a crown of glory," being "found in the way of righteousness," who alone can bear witness to the reality of this utterance of divine comfort. How many such, however, there are. How many, trembling on the verge of the threescore and ten, can summon the four evangelists of life—Infancy, Youth, Manhood, Age, to write their dying—their farewell testimony, as to God's unchanging fidelity, and that, too, despite of manifold conscious changes both around them and within them. There may be changes in their outward worldly

circumstances. All else—much else—may have failed them, or been taken from them: like that file of waggons of which we have just spoken, bearing away the boasted spoil and treasure of Chaldea. Ah! how many a waggon-load of earthly treasure—sacred, hallowed things, to which their yearning affections have clung like the fond votary to his gods—have they seen borne away? Now, it is the waggon-load of worldly goods, the gold and silver they had taken years to amass. Now, it is the waggon-load of loved clay-idols, hurled by the great foe of human happiness, from the dearest pedestals of their hearts, and sent away to the land of forgetfulness. Looking back through the long vista of the pilgrimage, what a strange file of spectral, funereal visions mingles with the hazy past! But there is ONE—the true divine ‘Recorder’ of events in earth and heaven—who is without any variableness. There is no alteration in the promises of His holy word. These, which the old man once lisped as a babe on his

mother's knee, are the same which now hang on his lips as he enters with feeble step the dark valley. The same Sun of righteousness which gilded life's early prime, gives a silver lining or golden fringe to the evening clouds. Like Jacob, with the same staff with which he set out in early morn from Bethel, he crosses Jordan. And not only is the world changed around him—external circumstances altered, but he is himself changed, a mere wreck of what once he was. The house of his earthly tabernacle, once strong and stable, is now fissured and rent with the chinks of age; the timbers are creaking, the windows are blurred and dimmed with cobwebs; the buckets are standing empty by the fountain, for "the wheel is broken at the cistern." No longer with elastic step can he go forth to climb the mountain, or to mingle with the reapers in the songs of harvest, or with the martial ranks in the shout of battle. But he has sublime compensations. While the outward man is perishing, the inward man is renewing day by day; and, as

in a former beautiful simile, like the eagle moulting its feathers, he "renews his strength." The old Christian, despite of bodily weakness and infirmity, occupies a noble vantage-ground in spiritual experience and blessing. With what a glory are those divine promises to him invested, of which we have already spoken, which the young believer knows nothing of! The one can only see these promises in the bud; the other has gathered the rich flowers and fruits of autumn. The one only catches, now and then, a glimpse of the mountain tops, as he ascends from the valley; the other, up among the snows of years, is breathing the pure and exhilarating air of 'the better country.' What a halo of glory encircles the head of the great Apostle, when he is "such an one as Paul the aged!" (Philem. 9.) He was left, as old age often is, alone, unsolaced. "Only Luke is with me" (2 Tim. iv. 11), was the utterance of the friendless man; and many around were doing all they could to embitter these closing moments, and mantle his evening

in clouds. But his faith was too deep, too strong for that. If he had trusted to the idols of his former life—the vain confidences in which once he gloried—it would have been a gloomy close to a chequered day. ‘But,’ says he, ‘nothing can shake my faith; they may leave me, scorn me, malign me, scourge me, kill me. They may consign this aged body to the flames, and scatter its ashes on the Tiber:—“But, nevertheless, I am not ashamed; for I know whom I have believed, and am persuaded that he is able to keep that which I have committed unto him against that day” (2 Tim. i. 12).

If we would have God as the prop of declining years, let us glorify Him with the strength of manhood. It is only if we can say with the Psalmist, “O God, Thou hast taught me from my youth, and hitherto have I declared Thy wondrous works,” that we can have good warrant to add, “Now also, when I am old and grey-headed, O God, forsake me not;” “forsake me not when my strength faileth.” It is a

miserable thing to give to Him the dregs and sweepings of life,—the remnants of “a worn and withered love.” In our great naval and military hospitals, it is only those grey-haired veterans who have fought the battle in youth and manhood, who can be received as in-door pensioners. It is long and devoted service which is the passport to admission there. The inmates bear upon them marks of the fight—the mutilated limb or the scar of battle, or medals hang on their breast, the mementoes of brave and heroic deeds. Let us work while it is called to-day. Let us give to God, not the crumbs which fall from life’s table, but the best of the feast; not the evening hour of weariness and sleep, but the morning prime of active energy; not the few stray winter berries left on the top of the olive-tree, but the ripe and abundant autumn fruits. And who among us shall have cause to lament the early surrender, the early consecration? Old age *without* God?—it is the picture of querulousness, discontent, fret-

fulness, gloom! Old age *with* God?—it is love, joy, peace, gentleness, goodness. In the one case, it is the rain and the wind and the storm entering through the gaping chinks and apertures of the shattered tabernacle, and the crouching old man sits shivering in the deepening night-shadows by the smouldering ashes of his chilly hearth: in the other, it is the sweet radiance of the summer sun sending its beams through these crevices of decaying earthly life. Nay, it is better; it is Jehovah's own light and love—stray sunbeams from the heavenly glory wandering down to illumine the crumbling tenement, tuning aged lips to sing, "My heart and my flesh faileth; but God is the strength of my heart, and my portion for ever." Old age *without* God?—the best wine is in this case taken first; youth and manhood drain the cup. When these are ended, it is exhausted; waning years must be content with "that which is worse," or mocked with the empty vessel. Old age *with* God?—the best wine is kept for the

last. Old age *without* God?—it is graphically described, in this chapter, as the overturn of all worldly pride and glory—"Bel boweth down, Nebo stoopeth;" it is the spoliation of the earthly temple, the pillage of everything that ministered to earth's ephemeral happiness. Old age *with* God—it can stand with the prophet, even in the midst of catastrophe and ruin and death, claiming as its own the sustaining words, "Even to your old age I am He; and even to hoar hairs will I carry you: I have made, and I will bear; even I will carry, and will deliver you."

"O joys, that sweetest in decay,
Fall not like withered leaves away;
But with the silent breath
Of violets drooping one by one,
Soon as their fragrant task is done,
Are wafted high in death !

Say not it dies, that glory,
'Tis caught unquenched on high;
Those saint-like brows so hoary
Shall wear it in the sky.
No smile is like the smile of death,
When, all good musings past,

Rise wafted with the parting breath,
The sweetest thought the last."

.

"And I with faltering footsteps journey on,
Watching the stars that roll the hours away,
Till the faint light that guides me now is gone ;
And like another life, the glorious day
Shall open o'er me from the empyreal height
With warmth, and certainty, and boundless light."

"IN THE MULTITUDE OF MY THOUGHTS WITHIN ME
THY COMFORTS DELIGHT MY SOUL."



"Kings shall see Him and arise ;
 Princes, and they shall prostrate themselves ;
 Because of JEHOVAH who is faithful,
 The Holy One of Israel, that hath chosen thee (*Barnes*).
 Thus saith JEHOVAH,
 In the time of favour have I heard thee,
 And in the day of salvation have I helped thee :
 And I will preserve thee, and give thee for a covenant of
 the people,
 To raise up the land, to colonise again desolate heritages
 (*Delitzsch and Wordsworth*) :
 Saying to the bound, ' Go forth ;'
 To them that are in darkness, ' Come to light ' (*Delitzsch*) :
They shall feed beside the ways,
And on all bare hills shall be their pasture (Alexander).
They shall not hunger, neither shall they thirst ;
And there shall not blind them the mirage and sun :
For He that hath mercy on them shall lead them,
And by bubbling water-springs shall He guide them (Delitzsch).

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 Lo, these shall come from afar ;
 And, lo ! these from the north and from the sea,
 And these from the land of the Sinese."

—ISAIAH xlix. 7-12

XIV.

**“Comfort ye, comfort ye, my people,
saith your God.”**

“They shall feed in the ways, and their pastures shall be in all high places. They shall not hunger nor thirst ; neither shall the heat nor sun smite them : for He that hath mercy on them shall lead them, even by the springs of water shall He guide them.”

—ISAIAH xlix. 9, 10.

**Desert
Mercies.**

LET us briefly glance at the context with which this beautiful verse stands connected.

The eight preceding chapters constitute the first portion of the great Gospel of comfort ; and as they seem primarily to have been designed for the consolation of the Jews in their exile, they contain frequent allusion to Babylon, the Captivity, and to Cyrus ; while only here and there is interjected a reference to a mightier spiritual Deliverer.

The chapters, however, on which we are now to enter, are different. In them there is comparatively brief and incidental mention made of the Babylonish captivity. The great Antitype almost exclusively fills the prophetic page. Cyrus, the Persian "sun" is well-nigh lost in the radiance of the true Sun of Righteousness. It is no longer a handful of weeping exiles by the river Euphrates which mainly claims our attention, but the children of universal humanity, enfranchised with a new and glorious liberty. Vision succeeds vision in rapid succession, all filled with the splendours of Messiah's reign, the glories of the Church militant on earth, and of the Church triumphant in heaven, which He is to purchase with His precious blood.

He Himself is the august Speaker, and thus He breaks silence in addressing the wider auditory (ver. 1)—"Listen, O isles, unto me; and hearken, ye people (or peoples), from far." He announces and unfolds His divine character and calling, as receiving His commission from

the Father (ver. 2)—“And He hath made my mouth like a sharp sword”—(who can doubt the identity of this description with that given in Revelation of Him, “out of whose mouth proceeded a sharp two-edged sword?”—Rev. i. 16); “in the shadow of His hand hath He hid me, and made me a polished shaft; in His quiver hath He hid me.” Beautiful picture! the Eternal Father throwing the shield of His protecting love and care over His Beloved Son; keeping Him safe in the hollow of His hand, “concealed in the quiver of His loving counsel, as men keep their swords and arrows in sheaths and quivers, ready for the time when they wish to use them” (*Delitzsch*). Are we not here forcibly reminded of two kindred visions in the Psalms and the Apocalypse? The divine Warrior, or Archer, seated on the white horse, going forth “conquering and to conquer” (Rev. vi. 2), whose “arrows are sharp in the heart of the King’s enemies” (Ps. xlv. 5), His bow, like that of Jonathan, never turning back. He

employs angels, indeed, as such flaming shafts. They are ever ready, at His bidding, to speed in their swift missions of love and mercy. All His faithful ministers and servants, too, are such arrows, emitted from the bow of this mighty One. But, in a nobler sense, He is Himself represented under the same figure. Jesus is here spoken of as 'the Arrow of God,'—a polished shaft in the divine quiver, waiting the appointed hour when He will be launched on His great mission to mankind, "*sent forth* to be a propitiation through faith in His blood."

The very words of the Father's commission are next given (ver. 3)—"And said unto me, Thou art my Servant, O Israel, in whom I will be glorified." "Israel:"—there can be no doubt this name refers to Christ, the Representative head of the Israel of God.* It was the transformed name of the patriarch Jacob—"thy

* So it has been interpreted by all the best expositors from the earliest times. "If you have ears to hear, you will hearken to God, who speaks to you by Isaiah concerning Christ, and calls Him by a figure Jacob and Israel."—*Justin Martyr*.

name shall be no more called Jacob, but Israel"—that is, as we have previously noted, "the prince, or soldier of God." And the Patriarch was, in this respect, an eminent type of Him who is at once "the Prince of the kings of the earth," and the Captain of His people's salvation. How many suggestive resemblances, indeed, to a Greater, are called up all throughout the changeful, chequered life of Jacob! When he lay down, that memorable sunset at Bethel on the cold earth, with a stone for his pillow, far from his father's house, did he not foreshadow Him, who, though "the foxes had holes, and the birds of the air had nests," had not "where to lay His head?" In those wrestlings with the angel at the brook Jabbok, all night until morning dawn, have we not vividly recalled to us Him, who "drank of the brook in the way;" also that fearful conflict He underwent in Gethsemane, when "there appeared from heaven an angel strengthening Him?" The night of wrestling at Jabbok procured Jacob his new

name and blessing ; that night at Gethsemane was the means of securing for Christ's people "all spiritual blessings in heavenly places," and of conferring on them the new name, "Sons and daughters of the Lord Almighty." Moreover, who can forget how this prophetic commission to glorify the Father, had its fulfilment in the triumphs over that hour and power of darkness? The anticipation of these, drew from His own lips the exultant words, "Now is the Son of man glorified, *and God is glorified in Him.*"

He is here first described as 'the Restorer of Israel,' who is "to bring Jacob again to Him" (ver. 5). The words following, "Though Israel be not gathered," are preferably rendered in the margin—a translation adopted by all our best interpreters, "That Israel may be gathered to Him, and that I may be glorious in the eyes of the Lord." But this is not enough ; there is the new and grander destiny, already referred to in reversion (ver. 6)—"It is a light thing"—or, as that has been rendered more literally

(*Hengstenberg*), "It is too little that Thou shouldest be my Servant, (only) to raise up the tribes of Jacob, and to restore the preserved of Israel; I will also give Thee for a light to the Gentiles, that Thou mayest be my salvation unto the end of the earth." Accordingly (in ver. 7), kings and princes are represented as rising in reverence from their thrones to do Him homage; and the waste-places of the earth—its desolate heritages, as being peopled and reclaimed. Then follow two images peculiar to Isaiah, and with both of which we are already familiar, descriptive of this great coming salvation. The first (ver. 9) is that of prisoners immured in dungeons, to whom the gladdening summons comes—"Go forth: to them that are in darkness, show yourselves." The other, which we have placed at the head of this meditation (vers. 9, 10), is that of the tender Shepherd-love of God, leading Joseph like a flock, levelling mountains and removing obstructions to make a highway for His ransomed, giving them undreamt-of

tokens of covenant mercy. Luxuriance upsprings on the sides of desolate hills, and streams appear in the midst of deserts. The mirage (as the word here again means) will not mock them with its deceitful and deceptive phantoms; the sun's rays will not blind or prostrate with overpowering heat. The Lord will be their sun and shield. There will be guidance, protection, refreshment, all that the pilgrim to eternity requires:—"They shall feed in the ways, and their pastures shall be in all high places. They shall not hunger nor thirst, neither shall the heat nor the sun smite (blind) them; for He that hath mercy on them shall lead them, even by the springs of water shall He guide them." These clustering visions of the Church's coming glory gather before the Prophet's eye; the whole earth is astir with the myriad throng hastening to the gates of Zion to do homage to her king,—from every far-off region,—the north and the west, and even 'the land of Sinim' (China). As he sees these

sheep, long without a shepherd, returning in crowds to their forsaken fold; he breaks forth, as is his wont, into a jubilant song—once more invoking the heavens and the earth and the mountains to lead the strain (ver. 13)—“Sing, O heavens; and be joyful, O earth; and break forth into singing, O mountains: for the Lord hath comforted His people, and will have mercy upon His afflicted.”

Have we made proof of this faithfulness of our Covenant God? In looking back on our wilderness path, can we not trace manifold similar evidences of His loving guidance, disarming fear, removing difficulty, mitigating the heat of the sun of trial, tempering the not less dangerous rays of the sun of prosperity, dissipating the deceitful mirage of the world, when often its phantom and illusory visions would have decoyed us from the path of safety and heaven? Let us trust His shepherd-ledings in the future, seeking to be guided by none but Him. And if at times there may be the chequered and

sorrowful experience, the thirsty land, the Hill Difficulty, the "desolate heritage,"—be it ours to look beyond them all to that glorious parallel picture, whose scenery is not the barren desert, the cloud and tempest and fierce sirocco, but the stormless skies and living streams, the pure fountains and verdant pastures of the true land of Beulah—the region of the blessed. There the ransomed travellers are thus sublimely described (may not St John have had the older vision of Isaiah before him, when he penned the most beautiful and affecting of his own glimpses of heaven?)—"They shall hunger no more, neither thirst any more; neither shall the sun light on them, nor any heat. For the Lamb, which is in the midst of the throne, shall feed them, and shall lead them unto living fountains of water; and God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes."

"When on the traveller's listless way
Rises and sets th' unchanging day,
No cloud in heaven to slake its ray,
On earth no sheltering bower."

.

"Thou wilt be there, and not forsake,
To turn the bitter pool
Into a bright and breezy lake,
The throbbing brow to cool!"

.

"From darkness here, and dreariness,
We ask not full repose;
Only be Thou at hand, to bless
Our trial-hour of woes.

Is not the pilgrim's toil o'erpaid,
By the clear rill and palmy shade;
And see we not, up earth's dark glade,
The gate of heaven unclosed?"

"IN THE MULTITUDE OF MY THOUGHTS WITHIN ME
THY COMFORTS DELIGHT MY SOUL."

"Sing aloud, O heavens ! and shout, O earth !

Ye mountains ! burst forth into a song :

For JEHOVAH hath comforted His people,

And on His afflicted He will have compassion.

But Zion sayeth, JEHOVAH hath forsaken me,

And my Lord hath forgotten me.

Can a woman forget her sucking infant,

That she should have no tenderness for the child of her womb

(Lowth) ?

Even though mothers should forget,

I will not forget thee.

Behold, on the palms of my hands I have graven thee ;

Thy walls are continually in my sight.

.

And kings shall be thy foster-fathers,

And their princesses thy nurses (*Delitzsch*) :

With face to the ground shall they bow to thee,

And lick the dust of thy feet ;

And thou shalt know that I am JEHOVAH,

He whose hoping ones shall not be ashamed " (*Delitzsch*).

—ISAIAH xlix. 13-16, 23.

XV.

**"Comfort ye, comfort ye my people,
saith your God."**

"Can a woman forget her sucking child, that she should not have compassion on the son of her womb? yea, they may forget, yet will I not forget thee. Behold, I have graven thee upon the palms of my hands; thy walls are continually before me."

—ISAIAH xlix. 15, 16.

**Unforget-
ting Love.** JUST as the rapturous notes of the triumphant hymn, quoted at the close of the preceding, are dying away on the ear, we are met with a strain on the minor key—a plaintive wail, like the tones of a funeral dirge.

It is Zion impersonated; she is represented as giving utterance to words of deep dejection (ver. 14)—"The Lord hath forsaken me, and my God hath forgotten me." As Jehovah had just been announcing His purposes of world-wide

mercy—salvation “to the ends of the earth”—we may take these words, in the first instance, as the plaint of literal Israel—‘The Lord has chosen the Gentile, and in doing so, He has forgotten *me*. The wild olive has been grafted in ; will not the natural olive be rejected ?’ Or it may be taken as the wail of the Church universal, prompted in times of rebuke and blasphemy, defection and apostasy, cruelty and persecution, when blood is flowing and martyr-fires are lighted ; or worse, when faith is weak, and love is waxing cold, and knees are bowing to Baal. The vessel is in danger, and the cry of the panic-stricken crew is, “Lord, carest Thou not that we perish !” Or again, the utterance may be regarded as the exclamation of the individual soul, amid frowning providences and baffling dispensations, when there is no silver lining to the cloud, or in that most awful of human experiences, when, apparently deserted and forsaken, it makes the sorrowful appeal, ‘Where is now my God ?’ In all the three cases

Jehovah's reply is the same—the assurance of His inviolable, unchanging, everlasting love.

This He enforces by two arguments. He answers the unworthy plaint of Zion, by the use of two beautiful and expressive figures.

The *first* (what we shall reserve for fuller illustration in a future exposition) is the mother's instinctive fondness for her babe. It is earth's most touching picture of constant devotion (ver. 15)—“Can a woman forget her sucking child, that she should not have compassion on the son of her womb? yea, they may forget.” They *have* a thousand times over. To cover shame; to hush a guilty secret; in the midst of the siege to satisfy the rage of hunger; or at the heathen altar to propitiate a bloodthirsty god,—they *have* forgotten. Nature may be thus untrue to her tenderest relationships—a mother may prove herself unworthy of the sacred name; “yet,” God says, “will I not forget thee.” My love is stronger than the strongest

of earthly ties. "Many waters cannot quench it, neither can the floods drown it." Or, as it is beautifully said in 'the Song of Songs' of this divine affection, "The coals thereof are coals of fire, which hath a most vehement flame" (viii. 6)—[lit. 'the coals of God']. It is a God-like emotion; there is nothing of the fitful or capricious, of the human element, in it;—to-day furnace-heat, to-morrow cooled down. It is divine, constant, everlasting. These flames of love on the heavenly altar are fed with "the coals of God!"

The *second* figure, and one equally beautiful, is taken from the graver's art (ver. 16)—"Behold, I have graven thee upon the palms of my hands; thy walls are continually before me." We have noted, in a previous chapter, the ancient practice of marking or tattooing the skin. These punctures, coloured with indigo, were rendered indelible by hot brands; and the custom being often connected with religious

rites, they not unfrequently took the shape of rude delineations of altars, or temples, or holy places.* It is a reference to this we have here. 'So little,' says Jehovah, 'have I forgotten thee, O Zion; I have thee engraven, in indelible memorial, on the palms of my hands; so that thy walls are continually before me,—kept in sacred and everlasting remembrance.'

Perhaps, indeed, it is unnecessary to resort to a heathen practice to illustrate and explain the figure. We know that the Jewish high-priest of old, in his approach to the Holy of Holies, carried on his breast a golden plate, set with four rows of precious stones, on which were graven the names of the children of Israel.

* Bishop Lowth notes that such a practice was not uncommon among the Jews themselves, to show their affection for their Temple. He adds, on the authority of Maundrell, "It is well known that the pilgrims at the Holy Sepulchre get themselves marked in this manner with what are called the ensigns of Jerusalem." All recent travellers to Palestine, are familiar with the souvenir "Pilgrim Rings" sold at this day in the Holy City, with a rude graving or delineation upon them of the Mosque of Omar (on the site of the Temple), and "the arms of Jerusalem."

Jesus, the great antitypical High-Priest, bears the names of His covenant people along with Him in His every approach to the throne. Only, instead of the golden breast-plate at the heart, the image is here transferred to the palms of His hands—those hands which are ever lifted up in pleading intercession—the hands which bear still the print of the nails, the perpetual memorial of His love and suffering, and the ground of His people's confidence. "Thou hast graven me," says Augustine, "on the palms of Thy hands; read that engraving, and save me." *

Let us take this twofold image for our comfort and consolation. A mother's love! few have not known its lavish tenderness, its sacred intensity, beginning with the cradle and ending only with the grave! In feeblest infancy, those early hours which memory fails to recall,—in childhood's seasons of pain and sickness, how

* Quoted by Dr Wordsworth *in loc.*

gladly has it surrendered nights of sleepless watching,—smoothing the pillow, opening an ever ready and willing ear for the confiding of little trials and ills, to which no other could patiently listen. When youth passes into incipient manhood, how that love expends itself in anxious prayers ! how it follows the absent one in thought by day and in dreams by night, to the far-off land of adoption. In the stormy, starless sky, how it travels in spirit to the labouring vessel ! how its wakeful ear is alive to every angry gust and every booming wave ! Or out amid the surges of battle, or by the low bivouac-fires, how real and acute is its slow martyrdom of palpitating fear—vigils of long suspense and mental torture ! And even if age has dulled other faculties and blunted other sensibilities, what is more touching, than, when death has put a sudden arrest on filial affection, to see that mother bending, in anguish over the pride of her heart and the nourisher of her old age,—the leaves over which she pores,

and from which alone she can draw consolation, blurred with the heavy tear-drops of parental sorrow! A mother's love! It is the strongest emotion when first kindled; it is the last to perish. It begins with the birth-pangs; it lingers undying, unquenched, over the tomb.

'This,' says God, 'this, and far more than this, O Zion, is my love to thee!'

"*Yet will I not forget thee,*" may well be our solace and support amid perishing earthly friendships and vacillating earthly love:—a glorious watchword to take with us through life, a cheerer in passing through the Dark valley. Ay, what will eternity be, but God loving His Church glorified, with more than a mother's love? "*Yet will I not forget thee;*" this, as He stoops over each ransomed child, will be the unending lullaby of heaven!

Or, take the other emblem; the Church, and every individual member of the Church, is engraven, where? Not on the mountains, for though called 'everlasting,' they are to 'depart;'

not on the hills, for they are 'to be removed;' not on the heavens, for they are to 'vanish as a scroll;' not on the sun, for it is to grow dim with age: on no part of outer nature,—on no pillar or cornice or wall of the Almighty's palace; for years would corrode the inscription, time would obliterate it. They have a more imperishable place upon the Hand of God. From that, nothing can erase them. The Patriarch's prayer is answered; they are "graven as with an iron pen and lead in the Rock for ever;" but that rock is the Rock of Ages (*Wordsw.*) As the mother's heart is the symbol of love and tenderness, so the palm of the hand is the symbol alike of strength and security. There is Love in God's heart, and Omnipotence in His arm; and these are both pledged and guaranteed in behalf of His Church and people. Is it the Church in her collective capacity, environed with the powers of evil? She has no might in herself against that great multitude. Had there been none 'stronger than the strong,' the dragon

of the Apocalypse would long ago have drowned the woman with the flood from his mouth.* But He that is with her, is greater than all that can be against her. Let not Zion, in unworthy misgiving, impugn the honour and faithfulness of her King, saying, "My God hath forgotten me;" He cannot forget; He has her walls and battlements so depicted as to be "continually before Him." These walls may be dilapidated; the weeds of apparent forgetfulness may be growing in their fissures. Man-deserted they may be, but God-deserted they cannot be. He, as well as His saints, "take pleasure in her stones, and favour the dust thereof."† The vessel may be tossed by angry storms; but let her steer, not by human landmarks—earthly beacon-lights, but by these two bright constellations here given us, telling of the *love* of God's Heart and the *power* of His Arm, and she will be brought to the desired haven.

* Rev. xii. 15, 16.

† Ps. cii. 14.

Or, in the case of the individual believer, does a cold shadow at times fall athwart his sunlit path, tempting him to doubt the rectitude of God's ways, and the faithfulness of His promises? Let him trust that inviolable, unforgetting Love. Like Ezekiel's monster wheels, God's providences may be often baffling; but they are "full of eyes." They are not shifting, capricious, untended, unregulated. The eyes of love and power are there; and in their complex evolutions and revolutions they are working out some grand end for His own glory and for His people's good. All else may perish, all else may prove recreant, faithless. The trusted may requite with base treachery; the 'summer friend' may abandon and forsake in the winter of adversity: the golden prop on which we leaned may give way; the tree under whose shadow we sat, may have its roots sapped and undermined by the stream; brother may be estranged from the early love of brother; the fond embrace of sisters may be among the mingled

memories of the past ; even the mother may be a traitor to her tenderest instincts and her dearest trust,—smiles may be merged into frowns, and love into cold hatred ; “ They *may* forget, *yet*,” says Jehovah, “ WILL I NOT FORGET THEE ! ”

“ The silent joy, that sinks so deep,
Of confidence and rest,
Lulled in a father’s arms to sleep,
Clasped to a mother’s breast ?

Who, but a Christian, through all life
That blessing may prolong ?
Who through the world’s sad day of strife,
Still chant his morning song ?

Fathers may hate us, or forsake,
God’s foundlings then are we ;
Mother on child no pity take,
But we shall still have Thee.”

“ IN THE MULTITUDE OF MY THOUGHTS WITHIN ME
THY COMFORTS DELIGHT MY SOUL.”



"The Lord JEHOVAH hath given me the tongue of a disciple,
That I may know how to speak a comfortable word to the
weary :

He awakeneth me morning by morning ;
He wakeneth mine ear to hearken with the attention of a
learner (*Lowth*).

The Lord JEHOVAH hath opened mine ear,
And I, I was not rebellious [I did not resist] (*Alexander*),
Neither did I turn away back.
I gave my back to the smiters,
And my cheeks to those plucking the hair (the beard) :
My face I hid not from shame and spitting.

Who is there among you a fearer of JEHOVAH,
That obeyeth the word of His servant,
That walketh in darkness, and without a ray of light?
(*Delitzsch*)

Let him trust in the name of JEHOVAH,
And rest himself on the support of his God (*Lowth*).

Behold, all ye who kindle a fire,
Who heap the fuel round about (*Lowth*) :
Walk ye in the light of your fire,
From my hand this shall be unto you,
That ye shall lie down in sorrow."

—ISAIAH I. 4-7, 10, 11

XVI.

**"Comfort ye, comfort ye my people,
saith your God."**

"Who is among you that feareth the Lord, that obeyeth the voice of His servant, that walketh in darkness, and hath no light? let him trust in the name of the Lord, and stay upon his God."

—ISAIAH l. 10.

**Light in
Darkness.** THE arbitrary division made by our translators into chapters, is occasionally unfortunate. It is so in the present one, the first three verses of which would have formed more appropriately the conclusion of the preceding chapter. From ver. 4th onwards, we have a prophecy, or prophetic episode, complete in itself. The theme is the great atoning work of Christ,—His obedience and sufferings, and the lessons which these have bequeathed to His people. Not only is it

Messiah who is the burden of the prediction, but it is Messiah who is Himself the speaker. He makes the personal announcement of His great mission and His qualifications for it. He reveals Himself in His threefold official character, as *Prophet*, *Priest*, and *King*. We may briefly glance at each of the three, in order the better to trace the connection of the prophecy with the words which stand at the head of this meditation.

(1.) We have Messiah's *Prophetical* office. In vers. 4, 5, He is brought before us, in His covenant relationship to the Father, as His servant—(rather, His “pupil,” His “disciple”)—receiving from Him the tongue of “instruction,” that He should know ‘how to speak a word in season to him that is weary;’ or, as that has been rendered, “to comfort the weary with words.”* Jehovah is beautifully represented

* “That I may know how to sustain him that is weary with a word” (*Jerome*).

“To help with words him that is exhausted” (*Delitzsch*).

“wakening Him morning by morning,” as if to whisper into His ear these comforting messages, and thus making Him an ever full and replenished storehouse of divine consolation for the Church in all ages. God spake to the prophets in dreams and visions of the night. But with the special prerogative of an earthly parent, in the case of the child he loves, the divine Father is pictured as coming each day-dawn to confide into the ear of His dear Son—His First-begotten—trusted words of support and succour for the weary. In the days of His flesh this declaration was pre-eminently true. Morning by morning the Spirit was poured upon Him without measure. He who rose “a great while before it was day,” to hold fellowship with the Unseen, and receive fresh inspiration from the infinite Fountain-head, came forth from these mysterious communings, like His great type in the firmament, “As a bridegroom cometh out of his chamber; and rejoicing as a strong man to run a race.” And still is He invisibly present,

as the Prophet and Instructor of His Church, to speak words of comfort and heart-cheer to His weary ones,—those we have already found described in a previous chapter as “broken reeds and smoking flax,” weary with sin, weary with sorrow. “He healeth the broken in heart, and bindeth up their wounds.”

Next, Messiah unfolds His *Priestly* office. He announces, in touching and solemn words, the right and qualification He possesses to be thus the Minister of consolation, and to utter the divine key-note for the weary, “Comfort ye, comfort ye my people.” It is on the ground of His voluntary humiliation, obedience, and meritorious death. The Lord God who wakens Him morning by morning, is represented in verse 5, as confiding a profound secret in His ear. It is that of His own great sacrificial work; and, moreover, that that work was necessarily to be accompanied with ignominy and suffering. He who combined in His adorable Person both

priest and victim, declares His own unhesitating, docile acquiescence;—"I was not 'rebellious, neither turned away back" (ver. 5). If, for the moment, trembling human nature dictated the prayer, "Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass;" the next, there was the assertion and triumph of the divine endurance,—the unresisting, un murmuring, "Thy will be done!" Then follows, more like the historical narration of a gospel Evangelist, a vivid picture of what the Great Surety actually endured; (ver. 6)—"I gave my back to the smiters, and my cheeks to them that plucked off the hair: I hid not my face from shame and spitting;" words which seem the prophetic echo, if it might be so expressed, of the utterance that came from the same lips, as recorded in St Luke xviii. 31, "Then took He unto Him the twelve, and said unto them, Behold, we go up to Jerusalem, and all things that are written *by the prophets* concerning the Son of man shall be accomplished. For He shall be delivered unto the Gentiles, and shall

be *mocked*, and spitefully entreated, and *spitted upon*: and they shall *scourge* Him and put Him to death." But the meek Sufferer faltered not in His undertaking. He will not be "rebellious, nor turn away back;" He will save others, Himself He will not save! Onward, with unflinching step He pursues His blood-stained path. He had the conscious assurance that the Almighty "Awakener" who had whispered in His ear comfort for others, would not desert nor forsake Him in His time of need; (ver. 7)—"For the Lord God will help me; therefore shall I not be confounded: therefore have I set my face like a flint, and I know that I shall not be ashamed." "I set my face as a flint"—"the holy hardness of perseverance," as this has well been called (*Stier*);—words, too, which doubtless have a special reference to the historic fulfilment, "When the time was come that He should be received up, He *steadfastly set His face* (as a flint) to go to Jerusalem"—Luke ix. 51 (*Michælis*). Amid all His untold sufferings

and indignities, confidence in His Father's supporting aid made Him resolute to bear all, in order that He might do that Father's will, and finish His work. He could make the challenge of His people His own, "If God be for us, who can be against us?"

Then 3dly, we get a glimpse of His *Kingly* office. First, in ver. 8, bearing royal rule in behalf of His Church and in defence of His people; identifying Himself with them, and in the mystery of His complex person, challenging the might of all their spiritual adversaries. It is as "Head over all," He issues in their name and His own the challenge, "Who will contend with me? who is mine adversary?" (*margin*—"master of my right") "let him come near to me." And the same *Kingly* rule is, at the close of the chapter, represented as exercised over His enemies,—those who bid defiance to the true Light, and kindle false fires of their own, which only lead them into outer darkness. They

perish in their unbelief. They "love the darkness rather than the light, because their deeds are evil." The righteous sentence goes forth from the lips of the rejected King, "whose mouth is a sharp sword," "This shall ye have of mine hand ; ye shall lie down in sorrow" (ver. 11).

The preceding prophecy, while thus giving a brief epitome of Messiah's entire work as the Redeemer of His Church, details, with specially graphic minuteness, the sufferings of the Lord Jesus in His "hour and power of darkness." "There was darkness over all the land ;" that darkness was the outer type and symbol of the more awful inner gloom which shadowed the soul of the Almighty Victim. Does no similar experience ever befall His people? Are there none among them walking, like Him, in similar darkness—seeing no light ; and in the bitterness of their souls sending up the apparently unsuccoured cry, "My God, my God, why hast

Thou forsaken me?" Yes! as with the Master, so with His disciples. They, too, have their experiences of ignominy, unkindness, reproach,—of spiritual gloom, and despondency. Ay, and with them, too, as it was *not* with Him, there is the bitter aggravation in the consciousness of personal sin, causing the ejaculation, with its mingled memories to ascend, "Oh that I were as in months past . . . when His candle shined upon my head, and when by His light I walked through darkness!" (Job xxix. 2, 3.)

Yet, the peculiarity of the case of those here stated is, that it is an *unwilling* darkness. It is when they are honestly seeking to "fear the Lord, and to obey the voice of His servant," that these sensible divine comforts are withdrawn. It is the experience of the wandering King of Israel, in the Psalm of his exile, "As the hart panteth after the water-brooks, so panteth my soul after Thee, O God;"—while, in the same breath with this earnest avowal of his faith, he adds, "My tears have been my

meat day and night, while they continually say to me, Where is now thy God?" What is the antidote? (ver. 10)—"Who is among you that feareth the Lord, that obeyeth the voice of His servant, that walketh in darkness, and hath no light? *let him trust in the name of the Lord, and stay upon his God.*" As in the case of the Great Sufferer of this prophecy, they can commit themselves to Him that judgeth righteously. "Unto the upright there ariseth light in the darkness." Confide in His faithfulness: darkness will yet be changed into light, and sorrow into joy. "Light is sown for the righteous, and gladness for the upright in heart." "Although thou sayest thou shalt not see Him, yet judgment is before Him, therefore trust thou in Him." The day, sooner or later, will come to every faithful God-fearer, when, emerging from the "encircling gloom," the cry of the Psalmist will be heard, "God is the Lord who hath shewed us light" (hath 'kindled for us the flame'—*Thrupp*). "Thou wilt light my candle:

the Lord my God will enlighten my darkness" (Ps. xviii. 28).

Such is the address to the believer. But there cannot well be disjoined from it, a similar, or rather, a contrasted address to the wicked, with which the chapter solemnly terminates. *They* have their time of darkness too, but it is accompanied with no such trust in God. They take their own ineffectual means of dispersing the gloom. They kindle a fire for themselves, to light up their uncertain way. It is the figurative method of expressing the many counterfeits to which the soul of man resorts, in order to obtain direction and guidance, happiness and peace, apart from God,—by the cross lights of human reason, worldly policy and expediency, self-righteousness, the pleasures of sin. But these will become "burning arrows, fiery darts" (*Gesenius*). These "fires of their own kindling" will at last resolve themselves into a bed of torment:—"They shall lie down in sorrow" (ver. 11); or, in the other kindred figure of

ver. 9, "The moth shall eat them." They will surrender themselves to the self-destroying power of wickedness. The moth is the most insignificant and apparently trifling instrument of destruction ; yet slowly and imperceptibly the fretted garment is rendered worthless. Such is the power of wickedness ; by little and little, moral beauty and loveliness is made 'to consume away like a moth ;' it may be a gradual, but it is a sure decay.

In the case of the believer, again, he need not be unnecessarily depressed by seasons of darkness. Unlighted, at times, his way may be ; but it is for him to walk boldly on ; sooner or later the path of the just will emerge in perfect day. "Then shall we know, if we follow on to know the Lord." "Commit thy way unto the Lord, trust also in Him, and He shall bring it to pass, *and He shall bring forth thy righteousness as the light, and thy judgment as the noonday.*"

Why, faithless soul, with drooping wings,
To unbelief make base surrender,

When each returning morning brings,
Proofs of God's love so vast and tender?
Though thou may'st weary grow of Him,
His love to thee can ne'er grow dim.

Though now, perchance, His gracious face
Veil for a time its former shining,
Yet trust Him where thou canst not trace,
Clouds yet will have their silver lining ;
The sun which midday storms enfold,
Will set in amethyst and gold.

Up ! up ! with eagle pinion rise,
Nor seek to pause on perch inglorious,
Till in the blue of heavenward skies,
O'er every cloud and storm victorious,
You come, with eye no longer dim,
To fold your wings with seraphim.

" IN THE MULTITUDE OF MY THOUGHTS WITHIN ME
THY COMFORTS DELIGHT MY SOUL."

"Hearken unto me, ye that are in pursuit of righteousness,
Ye seekers of Jehovah :
Look unto the Rock from whence ye have been hewn,
And to the hollow of the pit whence ye are dug.
Look up to Abraham your forefather,
And unto Sarah who bore you :
For he was but one when I called him (*Alexander*),
And I blessed him, and multiplied him.
Thus therefore shall Jehovah console Zion (*Lowth*),
Comfort all her ruins ;
And He shall make her wilderness like Eden,
And her steppe as into the Garden of God (*Delitzsch*) ;
Joy and gladness shall be found in her,
Thanksgiving, and sounding music (*Delitzsch*).

*Lift up unto the heavens your eyes,
And look down unto the earth beneath ;
Verily like smoke shall the heavens be dissolved,
And the earth fall to pieces like a garment,
And its inhabitant shall just so die :
But my salvation to eternity shall be,
And my righteousness shall not go to ruin."*

—ISAIAH li. 1-3, 6.

XVII.

“Comfort ye, comfort ye my people,
saith your God.”

“Lift up your eyes to the heavens, and look upon the earth beneath ; for the heavens shall vanish away like smoke, and the earth shall wax old like a garment, and they that dwell therein shall die in like manner : but my salvation shall be for ever, and my righteousness shall not be abolished.”

—ISAIAH li. 6.

The Great Contrast. THIS and the following chapters consist of alternate addresses of comfort spoken by Messiah to His weary ones, and the replies to these on the part of His people.

“Hearken !” is His first gracious word of invocation. He had closed the preceding chapter with predictions of wrath to the unbelieving ; now He turns to the “followers after

righteousness," the "seekers after God" (ver. 1), the true and genuine Israel of all ages, who, renouncing the sparks of their own kindling—forsaking the false and unreal—were clinging to noble and enduring verities. He exhorts them, even in the midst of doubt and darkness, trouble and perplexity—the mysteries of the present—to exercise simple faith in His love and power. For this purpose He recalls the example of Abraham, the father and founder of the Jewish nation, who, hoping against hope, and believing against unbelief, was "strong in faith, giving glory to God." "I called him alone" (ver. 2). Alone!—*i.e.*, when he was a unit, a solitary pilgrim and sojourner, from another land, childless, heirless, "as good as dead." But the Almighty Being whom this feeble one served, promised to make of him a great nation;—that the barren 'rock' (ver. 1) would be turned into a living spring. The stars of the eastern sky were made the emblems of his unnumbered seed. And He was faithful who thus 'promised.'

He "blessed him and increased him" (ver. 2). So may His Church and people similarly trust His interposition in the darkest and gloomiest hour of their need:—"The Lord shall comfort Zion: He will comfort all her waste-places; and He will make her wilderness like Eden, and her desert like the garden (or Paradise) of the Lord" (ver. 3).

The theme, too, He here selects (His first new word of comfort for the weary) is the same which is associated with the name of the faithful Patriarch—"Ye that follow after *righteousness*" (ver. 1); 'My *righteousness* is near' (ver. 5); 'My *righteousness* shall not be abolished' (ver. 6). As "Abraham believed God, and it was counted to him for *righteousness*" (Rom. iv. 3); so is Christ "the end of the law for righteousness to every one that believeth" (Rom. x. 4). 'The righteousness' of Jehovah-Jesus is 'unto all and upon all them that believe' (Rom. iii. 22). Then the Divine Speaker proceeds to draw the magnificent contrast contained in the

motto-words, between the most enduring and noblest of earthly things, and imperishable spiritual realities.

He takes a twofold illustration, from the dissolution of the outer material world, and the dissolution of the human body.

First, He takes an illustration from nature's material framework. He summons us to lift up our eyes to these same heavens, with their troop of stars—the same lustrous worlds on which the eye of Abraham gazed ; or to turn to the platform of earth, with its multitudinous symbols of enduring strength—its rocks and mountains, its plains and oceans and rivers. They are to 'vanish as smoke ;' they are to 'wax old as doth a garment.' It is not by any means necessary that we deduce from these words the old theory of annihilation ; that the day is ever coming when that mighty mass of planets and universes, with their teeming throngs of life, is to be torn to shreds and atoms, and there is

suddenly to supervene a wholesale bankruptcy of matter and being. So far, indeed, as the underived happiness and glory of God are concerned, this might be. He would be infinitely happy and glorious even were every star to leave vacant its throne, every altar-fire in heaven to be quenched, and Himself to be once more alone, the solitary tenant of immensity. But we have nothing either in reason or in Scripture to sanction such doom and destruction of present materialism. There will be the dissolution of the present economy only for its reconstruction. Yet, even in this restricted sense, the things that are seen are but temporal and temporary. The present apparent stability is not a real permanence; the so-called 'everlasting mountains' are not everlasting; the earth's pillars of primeval granite will again be overthrown, as they were, millions of years ago, when the globe was the theatre of frightful convulsion and dismemberment. There are gigantic elements of destruction at work within

it; the volcanoes are slumbering that are to wrap it in conflagration.

But the Divine Speaker takes another and more patent illustration. There may be those who discredit the thought of any such violence being done to the order of nature;—who, as they watch her unvarying sequences, the majestic roll of her seasons, can trace no spot nor wrinkle nor furrow of age, either in heaven above or on earth beneath; and therefore He enforces His comparison from a different point of view. He takes up the consideration of our own frailty and mortality (ver. 6)—“And they that dwell therein shall die in like manner.” Who can resist the accuracy and cogency, at least of this averment? that the narrow house “appointed for all living” awaits each one of us; that the path of poverty and riches, childhood and age, obscurity and glory, “leads but to the grave?” The mightiest cannot avert or evade the common doom of the dust. The world’s conqueror cannot include this stronghold among his victories.

The world's wisest cannot invent the panacea to cure or counteract this great paralysis of life. Sooner or later the words of the Prophet in the case of each one of us will have a too truthful fulfilment—"How is the strong staff broken, and the beautiful rod?" "There is a time to die," and, "there is no discharge in that war." If, therefore, when we look up to the calm worlds above us, star on star, moored like gleaming ships in their quiet nightly haven; or to the steadfast glories of the material globe around us, unshattered, for long centuries, by earthquake or convulsion or storm; if, in such a contemplation, we may fail to own the possibility of dissolution, or even of decrepitude and decay (how in any sense it can be averred that "the heavens shall vanish away like smoke, and the earth shall wax old like a garment"); too truthful surely, at least, is the figure of transitoriness, evanescence, mutability, when we come to tread the burial-ground, and ponder the problem of our own fleeting life and mortality. The

sun of each one of us is westering. We have the sentence of death in ourselves. The world is sprinkled with sepulchres. It is more a home of the dead than the abode of the living. These now stout and brave hearts—yes, the stoutest and the bravest—

“Still, like muffled drums, are beating
Funeral marches to the grave.”

In looking to the enduring fabric of outer nature, its unvarying sequences may appear to countersign the scoffer's plea, “All things continue as they were.” But, by many a tearful and dismal memory, we cannot so dismiss or negative the stern reality of the words, “They that dwell therein shall die in like manner.”

And then comes the grand antithesis. It would almost seem as if the Saviour had this very passage in view, when He uttered, in the after-days of His incarnation, the parallel saying, “Heaven and earth shall pass away, but my words shall not pass away” (Matt. xxiv.

35). Earth's most enduring things may and will perish. The palace walls will crumble; the human tenant will undergo the same doom of the dust. But the righteousness and the salvation of God are beyond the possibility of wreck and decay; the provisions of the everlasting covenant, begun in grace here, will be perpetuated in endless glory hereafter. The Almighty Speaker, in the strong figures of this verse, would tell of the poor portion which accrues to those who are satisfied, for their all, with what is "of the earth, earthy;" who make their perch the world's shifting ambitions and perishable riches and fleeting pleasures, who build their nests on any bough save on the Tree of Life. Ye who may have tried every such perch, and find how unstable is the footing—how the prowling night-winds of misfortune, or the hurricane of death have bared your nest, or brought the bough on which you had built it with a crash to the ground,—oh! speed your flight upward to lasting realities; pause not

until you have folded your wings in the clefts of the true Rock:—"My heart is overwhelmed: lead me to the Rock that is higher than I." It is only, at best, tent-life here; the permanent mansions are above. God would speak to you, in the words which head this meditation, by the magnificent argument of departing heavens, and by the earth undergoing its predicted baptism of fire. But He would speak to you also by a nearer, tenderer plea;—by the graves of your households—the many yawning graves and blanks in your homes and hearts. He would tell you, by the lessons of mortality all around, that if you would wish to lay up what is enduring, you must hold with a loose and feeble grasp what, sooner or later, will be like the vanishing smoke or the moth-eaten garment, and seek that Salvation which is alone "for ever," and that righteousness which "shall not be abolished."

All things are fleeting. Summer's burning glow
Is soon exchanged for Autumn's mellowed skies;

While Winter, surpliced in his robe of snow,
Stands round the dying year's last obsequies.

Month after month, some vacant chair is seen—
Some music of home voices hushed and gone ;
The holy memories of what has been,
Carved by loved hands on the sepulchral stone.

Ere long, the sun shall wear his sackcloth pall,
The moon shall cease to lend her silvery gleam,
From their bright seats the vassal stars shall fall,
And earth shall vanish like a waking dream.

"But THOU remainest !" O'er no joys of Thine
Can toll the requiem of the funeral bell ;
But like perennial streams from fount divine,
Onward they flow unchanged—unchangeable.

"IN THE MULTITUDE OF MY THOUGHTS WITHIN ME
THY COMFORTS DELIGHT MY SOUL."

“Awake, awake, clothe thyself in might, O arm of JEHOVAH;
Awake, as in the days of ancient times, the ages of the olden
world.

Was it not Thou that didst hew Rahab in pieces, that pierced
the dragon?

Art not Thou the same that didst dry up the sea, the waters
of the great billow (*Delitzsch*);

That didst turn the depths of the sea into the way for the
passage of redeemed ones?

Thus shall the ransomed of JEHOVAH return,

And come to Zion with shouting;

And everlasting gladness shall crown their heads:

Joy and gladness shall they obtain;

And sorrow and sighing shall flee away.

I—I am your Comforter:

Who art Thou, that Thou shouldst be afraid of man that is
to die,

And the son of man who is to be made as grass:

That thou shouldst forget JEHOVAH thy Creator,

Who stretched out the heavens, and founded the earth;

That thou shouldst be afraid continually all the day,

Of the fury of the tormentor,

As if he were preparing to destroy?

And where is the fury of the tormentor left (*Delitzsch*)?

For I am JEHOVAH thy God,

Restraining the sea, when his waves roar (*Barnes*);

JEHOVAH of Hosts is His name.”

—ISAIAH li. 9-15

XVIII.

“Comfort ye, comfort ye my people,
saith your God.”

“Therefore the redeemed of the Lord shall return, and come with singing unto Zion ; and everlasting joy shall be upon their head : they shall obtain gladness and joy ; and sorrow and mourning shall flee away.”

—ISAIAH li. 11.

The Joy of the Ransomed. IN the preceding part of the chapter, Messiah had unfolded a glorious theme. “Righteousness” was the opening word He addressed to His weary ones—“My righteousness is near ; my salvation hath gone forth” (ver. 5). Encouraged with this and other comforting assurances, they break forth with the response and invocation (ver. 9)—“Awake, awake, put on strength, O arm of the Lord !” Often that puissant arm seems to

slumber, as in the long seventy years of Babylonish captivity, or in those protracted seasons of persecution and apostasy to which the Church has been no stranger, when the cry goes up from before the altar, "Lord, how long?" The exiles on the banks of the Euphrates, and the suffering Church in all ages, renew the remembrance of the greatest and grandest of miraculous deliverances. They recall what His right hand (the emblem of His power) had effected at the Exodus, "in the ancient days, in the generations of old." It had "cut Rahab,"—*i.e.*, demolished the insolence and arrogance of Egypt. It had "wounded the dragon" (or the crocodile, the mighty river-monster, the invariable symbol of proud Pharaoh). It had "dried the (Red) Sea, the waters of the great deep;" it had "made the depths of the sea the way for the ransomed to pass over" (vers. 9, 10). These monsters of the Nile were, in the Egyptian mythology, regarded as the emblems of their Spirit of Evil; and we

know that oftentimes Pharaoh and his hosts are taken in Scripture as symbols of Satanic rage and power,—types of the inveterate adversaries of the Church of Christ, headed by “the Great Dragon” of the Apocalypse, who is here represented as a marksman with the string upon his bow, preparing to destroy (ver. 13). That glorious overthrow of ancient days is to us the pledge of a like victory over all our spiritual enemies; when the challenge of ver. 13 shall be triumphantly made, “Where is the fury of the oppressor?” “Sing unto the Lord, for He hath triumphed gloriously.” The Church now, as then, loves to rehearse these tokens and evidences of Jehovah’s succouring love and almighty power;—to gaze in the distant past on these Mizar-hills of His faithfulness, radiant with sunlight, when all else is in shadow—“I will remember the works of the Lord: surely I will remember Thy wonders of old” (Ps. lxxvii. 11). This is her comfort in her hours of greatest peril and despondency, “The Lord’s arm is never

shortened that it cannot save, nor His ear heavy that it cannot hear." Without even waiting for an answer to her cry, she farther appropriates, on the ground of these antecedents, the beautiful promise of a former chapter (xxxv.), that of final, complete, and everlasting salvation. As surely as the King of Jeshurun had made a pathway for His people through the mighty waters, and brought them to the land promised to their fathers; so surely would He guarantee a safe conduct for the myriads of His ransomed Church in all ages, through the world's wilderness to the true heavenly Canaan (ver. 11)—"Therefore the Redeemed of the Lord shall return, and come with singing unto Zion; and everlasting joy shall be upon their head: they shall obtain gladness and joy; and sorrow and mourning shall flee away."

Jehovah now answers His people's invocation. He immediately endorses their words. 'Yes,' says He, "I, even I, am He that comforteth

you." Then follow verses, which, in their literal acceptation, have put joy and solace and hope into the heart of many a hapless prisoner and captive, pining unsuccoured in dungeons, where war or bigotry, despotism or slavery have immured them. It is a passage which will always, to many sad hearts, be associated with an incident amid the terrible memories of our Indian Mutiny. During those weeks of blank horror in the beleaguered fortress of Lucknow, a tender female (who had lost all hope save in God, but to whose mercy she still fondly clung, even in the delirium of despair), picked up from the ground a torn and soiled morsel of paper : it turned out to be the leaf of a Bible. As she opened it, her eye traced the blotted words. They seemed like a message dropped by some invisible angel amid the shadows of death. They were these : "I, even I, am He that comforteth you : who art thou, that thou shouldest be afraid of a man that shall die, and of the son of man that shall be made as grass ; and for-

gettest the Lord thy Maker, that hath stretched forth the heavens, and laid the foundations of the earth; and hast feared continually every day, because of the fury of the oppressor, as if he were ready to destroy? and where is the fury of the oppressor? The captive exile hasteneth that he may be loosed, and that he should not die in the pit, nor that his bread should fail. But I am the Lord thy God, that divided the sea, whose waves roared: The Lord of hosts is His name. And I have put my words in thy mouth, and have covered thee in the shadow of mine hand, that I may plant the heavens, and lay the foundations of the earth, and say unto Zion, Thou art my people" (li. 12-16).

But the words have also a higher, truer, spiritual interpretation with reference to the Church. "Awake, awake, O arm of the Lord," said Zion to Jehovah (ver. 9)—"Awake, awake, stand up, O Jerusalem," is His encouraging response (ver. 17). He is to 'cover' His Church 'in the shadow

of His hand' (ver. 16), in all times of her earthly tribulation;—moreover, when the days of her mourning are ended, as the captive exile 'leaps forth from his chains in haste to be free' (14), so, with every fetter of sin and sorrow broken, shall she go forth into the glorious light of her eternal day.

No New Testament—no Gospel utterance, could be more beautiful, than this picturing in our motto-verse of the return of the redeemed of the Lord to Zion. It points, at the outset, to the grounds of their confidence and joy. They are *ransomed* travellers: they have found the "Righteousness" and the "Salvation" spoken of at the commencement of the chapter. They go on their pilgrim way exulting in Him whose arm "hath wounded the dragon,"—the "Man of God's right hand," who in His Cross and Passion hath "destroyed him that had the power of death, that is the devil, and delivered them who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage." They are more than

conquerors through Him that loved them (Heb. ii. 14, 15 ; Rom. viii. 37).

They are farther here truthfully represented, even in the course of their journey through the wilderness, as filled "with peace and joy in believing," "abounding in hope." Many, while they picture a coming heaven as a place of unmingled happiness and felicity, are apt to depict the journey thither as one of gloom,—every pilgrim reaching it with the furrow on his brow and the tear in his eye ; that if any chimes of gladness reach his ears, they come from bells *within* the gates of the city, not without. But these words tell differently and more truly. A nimbus of glory surrounds his head. The desert is resonant with song. Gladness and joy are here represented as two attendants—sister spirits, accompanying him all the way, hand in hand. Yes! the Christian is a joyful man. Though it be a wilderness he treads, and though sorrow and mourning are also depicted as tracking his footsteps, yet he

has elements of tranquil happiness within him which make the song, not the tear, the appropriate exponent of his thoughts and emotions. It were strange, indeed, were it otherwise. At peace with God; sin forgiven; the heart changed; the affections elevated; grace moulding, sustaining, quickening, sanctifying; and, rising above all, the assured hope of glory hereafter. He can say, "Thou hast put gladness in my heart, more than in the time that their corn and their wine increased" (Ps. iv. 7). The words, too, seem to tell of an ever-augmenting joy. As the portals of glory draw nearer, the song deepens in melody and strength. They come to Zion "with singing;" then "everlasting joy is on their head." Then they obtain a new anointing of "gladness;" and finally "sorrow and mourning,"—these two companions of the wilderness,—rise on their sombre, gloomy wings, and speed away for ever!

Is that happiness in any feeble measure ours?
Can we appropriate to ourselves, in lowly,

humble confidence, that grandest of titles, "The Redeemed of the Lord?" Have we on the pilgrim garb,—the Righteousness alike imputed and implanted—the attire of the King's daughter, all-glorious without,—“all-glorious within?” and is our chief element of joy in the prospect of the Heavenly Zion—not the negative one, the absence of sorrow and mourning—but that which consists in the vision and fruition of Zion's God, assimilation to His character, conformity to His will, active energy in His service, serving Him day and night in His Temple (Rev. vii. 15). Oh! with such a hope, we may well be patient under present trial; though ‘sorrowful,’ we may be ‘alway rejoicing.’ “God our Maker giveth songs in the night.” Better the night, with songs in it, than no night and no song. Better the thorn in the nest to tempt to this magnificent flight, than to settle in the downy nest of false security and ease, selfishness and death.

The world has its joys too; but, apart from

God, they are a poor counterfeit of the true. They are often precarious, uncertain, fitful while they last: the grave will sooner or later close over them, and they will vanish like the transient flash of summer lightning, never to be recalled, or "as a dream when one awaketh." But, Christians! "everlasting joy," like a festive chaplet or coronet, shall be upon your head. Yours are to be robes ever bright, palms ever green, crowns never fading. "The Lord shall be your everlasting light, and the days of your mourning shall be ended."

"Here, the great unrest of ages ;
Here, the trouble, toil, and strife :
There, the peaceful, quiet waters,
Of the crystal stream of life.

Here, the sighing of the branches ;
Here, the wave-beat on the shore :
There, the ceaseless strain of angels
Chanting praises evermore.

Here, the rocks and shoals and quicksands ;
Here, the home beneath the sod :
There, the haven where we would be ;
There, the presence of our God."

"IN THE MULTITUDE OF MY THOUGHTS WITHIN ME
THY COMFORTS DELIGHT MY SOUL."

"Awake, awake ; clothe thyself in thy might, O Zion ;
 Clothe thyself in thy garments of beauty, O Jerusalem !
 thou City of holiness :
 For no more shall enter into thee the uncircumcised
 and the polluted.
 Shake thyself from the dust ; sit on thy lofty throne, O
 Jerusalem (*Lowth*) :
 Loose the chains from thy neck, O captive daughter of Zion.

.
 How lovely appear upon the mountains
 The feet of the joyful messenger, publishing peace (*Barnes*) ;
 Bringing glad tidings of good, announcing salvation ;
 That saith unto Zion, *Thy God reigneth royally* (*Delitzsch*) !
 Hark, thy watchmen ! They raise the voice ; they shout
 together :
 For eye to eye they see how JEHOVAH bringeth Zion home
 (*Delitzsch*).
 Burst forth into joy, shout together, ye ruins of Jerusalem
 (*Lowth*),
 For JEHOVAH hath comforted His people, He hath re-
 deemed Jerusalem.

.
 Verily not in confusion shall ye go forth,
 And not by flight shall ye march onwards :
 For JEHOVAH shall march in your front,
 And bringing up your rear, the God of Israel."

—ISAIAH lii. 1-2, 7-9, 12

XIX.

“Comfort ye, comfort ye my people,
saith your God.”

“Thy God reigneth.”

—ISAIAH lii. 7.

Glad
Tidings.

THERE are few portions of Isaiah which combine more obviously than this, both an historical and evangelical reference, and each of these is beautiful and significant.

To begin with the former. Jerusalem is represented (in ver. 1) as a dejected female mourner,—a widow in her weeds, or a prisoner in her prison garments, with chains (the symbol of degradation and captivity) around her neck, sprinkling her head with the dust in which she

sits; degraded, powerless. As a commentator expresses it, "She is lying on the ground, stupified with the wrath of God, and exhausted with grief." In the former chapter, as we noted in considering the passage, she had raised the supplicatory cry, "Awake, awake; put on strength, O arm of the Lord" (ver. 9). The answer comes a second time from the Being she there invoked. It is a fresh verbal echo of her prayer—"Awake, awake; put on thy strength, O Zion; put on thy beautiful garments, O Jerusalem, the holy city" (ver. 1). 'Lay aside that sombre attire, these robes of grief; and put on festive raiment of gladness and joy;'—alluding, either to the sacerdotal robes used by Aaron and his successors in the tabernacle and Temple, or to those of princely and regal splendour which belonged to her as the regal capital, the metropolis of God, the city of the Great King (*Deiitzsch*). She is farther summoned, not only to arise from this dust of humiliating servitude,—to gather up her loose,

soiled garments, and undo her shameful fetters,—but to ‘sit down’ (in eastern fashion) on a royal throne or Divan, as an honoured queen [*Targum*] (ver. 2).

In strong poetic language, Jehovah is represented, in ver. 5, as if He felt her degradation to be a reflection on His own greatness and power. “Now, therefore, what have I here” (rather—as that has been rendered by more than one expositor—‘What have *I* to do here’), “saith the Lord, that my people is taken away for nought?” His glory is implicated in the continuance of Zion’s oppression. While, on the one hand, the capricious tyrants that enslave her “make her to howl,” and His “name continually every day is blasphemed” (ver. 5), the unworthy taunt is uttered that He is powerless to effect her emancipation. Thus beautifully identifying Himself with His exiled people (one with them in their captivity), He utters, if we may so express it, the soliloquy of injured Omnipotence, “What have *I* to do here?” But, He

adds, "They shall know my name" (ver. 6)—my impugned honour shall be vindicated, my arm shall be bared; and again, the cities of Judah shall "behold their God!"

By a beautiful and abrupt transition, another scene in the shifting drama discloses itself; a new and brilliant picture rises before the Prophet's eye. On the heights of ruined Zion, amid the mouldering walls and towers of her old Temple, watchmen are represented as pacing up and down, casting ever and anon a longing, wistful eye in the direction of the great northern highway—so full of historic interest—but whose last association was that of its being trodden by a band of weeping captives on their way to Babylon. The vision which had crowded many a dream and many a prayer is at length realised. Yes! there, on those distant green slopes of Scopus—the northern outlier of Mount Olivet—or among its deserted olive-gardens, a trumpet, like that of their old jubilee, is heard waking the echoes of the silent hills "round

about Jerusalem." Messengers are descried approaching the city; the Kedron valley is all that separates them from these Temple warders. And it must, too, be some joyful tidings they bear; for, weary and dust-covered though they be with their long journey, they are described (now that it is about to terminate), as bounding with elastic step over the mountains, like the gazelles spoken of in the Song of Songs (*Delitzsch*). In that clear, still air, they can proclaim the object of their mission. The sentinels on Zion, who, it may be, for months or years had been gazing from their watchtowers with wakeful vigilance, now burst out into the exclamation, "How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of him that bringeth good tidings, that publisheth peace; that bringeth good tidings of good, that publisheth salvation; that saith unto Zion, Thy God reigneth!"

Then, in ver. 8, the Prophet is represented (as the words have rather been translated) calling attention to the voice of the watchmen—"Hark!

thy watchers! they lift up the voice; together they sing: for they see eye to eye how Jehovah bringeth Zion home!" They may have had many a surmise and discussion,—musing with one another as to the time and way and method of the captive's return,—just as we have chronological prognosticators on unfulfilled prophecy in our churches still, with their endlessly diversified and often presumptuous theories. But all is now made plain, to that faithful remnant of patriot Jews, regarding the manner of the long predicted, long looked-for restoration. They see eye to eye how Jehovah's sure word of promise is to be verified. Doubtless, merging all their preconceived opinions in the happy realisation of 'hope deferred,' they would now "lift up the voice, and together sing"—"When the Lord turned again the captivity of Zion, we were like them that dream. . . . The Lord hath done great things for us, whereof we are glad" (Ps. cxxvi. 1, 3).

The heralds from the exiles have a short but

blessed message to give. It is in three words—"Thy God reigneth." It is the brief formula, the coronation cry, used when oriental kings ascended their thrones:—"Zion! thy God is again to reign right royally within thee; peace is to be within thy walls, and prosperity within thy palaces." It is the same opening watchword in those Psalms, which modern criticism, with great probability, has referred to the 'Anodus' or return from Babylonish captivity—"The Lord reigneth! let the earth rejoice, let the multitude of isles be glad thereof" (Ps. xcvi. 1). "The Lord reigneth; let the people tremble: He sitteth between the cherubims; let the earth be moved. The Lord is great in Zion; and He is high above all the people" (Ps. xcix. 1, 2) (*Wordsw.*) And now comes (ver. 9) the appeal, either from the Prophet or from the watchmen. It is an invocation to the dumb, voiceless stones and ruins of Jerusalem to keep silence no longer; but in a bold figure, borrowed by several later poets, these are sum-

moned to join in the jubilant anthem—"Break forth into joy; sing together, ye waste-places" (or rather, shout together ye ruins—*Lowth*) "of Jerusalem, for the Lord hath comforted His people, He hath redeemed Jerusalem." The grand procession is seen leaving the gates of Babylon, not like the old precipitate flight from Egypt, but slowly and deliberately bearing the holy vessels which had been sacrilegiously taken by Nebuchadnezzar from the Temple—a great 'Sacramental host,' "the armour-bearers of Jehovah" (*Alexander*). Jehovah Himself, the God of the ancient pillar-cloud, is still, as in the Sinai desert, the Guardian of their march, in front and in rear, and making bare His holy arm for their defence and safety, (ver. 10, 11, 12)—"Depart ye, depart ye, go ye out from thence, touch no unclean thing; go ye out of the midst of her; be ye clean, that bear the vessels of the Lord. For ye shall not go out with haste, nor go by flight: for the Lor

will go before you, and the God of Israel will be your rereward."

Such is the literal picture. Turn we now to the Gospel and Spiritual one. For that this literal meaning is truly subordinate to the other, we have the express testimony of the Apostle Paul, in the 10th chapter of his Epistle to the Romans (ver. 15) ; He there gives to the words an entirely evangelical signification, referring them to the preaching of the gospel by the apostles, and other ambassadors of Christ. "How," says he, "shall they preach, except they be sent?" As it is written, "How beautiful are the feet of them that preach the gospel of peace, and bring glad tidings of good things." The truest interpretation of the passage, therefore, points to that mighty deliverance vouchsafed to the world from the bondage of sin,—the glad tidings of "great joy to all people," of which the return from Babylon was the pledge and earnest. The eye of the Prophet beheld,

in significant symbol, the human race in a state of degradation and ruin. None can by any means save himself or redeem his brother. Humanity, like a dethroned monarch—a captive queen, sat powerless in the dust. Many had sought to solve the problem of her self-restoration; but all the wisdom of man, all that human reason and philosophy could devise, had failed to undo the iron fetters, and let the oppressed go free. Some, however, there were—wakeful sentinels amid her temple ruins—who from the watchtowers of faith and hope gazed ardently for divine succour—the Simeons and Annas, the Marys and Elizabeths and Nathaniels, who “waited for the Consolation (THE COMFORTER) of Israel,” longing for a true Sun of Righteousness to rise on a benighted world. They waited not in vain. The Baptist was first hailed as a herald of glad tidings on the mountains; and then the Great Consoler Himself appeared, “publishing peace,” “good tidings of good,” in one word, “*Salvation* ;”—uttering the

welcome note, the response to the long wail of suffering humanity, "*Comfort ye, comfort ye my people, saith your God.*" The prophet in heavenly vision beholds, far beyond the historical application, the swift-footed messengers speeding from country to country, from race to race, carrying the tidings of salvation round the globe. He sees a whole world brought under the beneficent reign of the Prince of Peace, and can exclaim (ver. 10)—"The Lord hath made bare His holy arm in the eyes of all the nations; and all the ends of the earth shall see the salvation of our God." Moreover, in Paul's spiritual application of the passage, there is included a call to Zion to go forth everywhere and evangelise. The Church is not to rest till every mountain on earth's surface be gladdened with the feet of Gospel messengers, with trumpet-tongue proclaiming the salvation of her great King. And when this universal triumph of Christ and His Gospel is consummated, not the least beautiful feature of that consummation

will be, that the now jarring watchmen, alienated by unworthy divisions and jealousies, will be brought to act in divine and holy harmony: hushed will be the tones of party discord—"With the voice together they shall sing;" for their common interest in Zion will be dearer than the narrow interest of sect or party. "They shall see eye to eye;" or, as the LXX translate it, "Eyes shall look to eyes, when the Lord shall have mercy upon Zion."

And what is the theme of these "lovely-footed" messengers, thus swift to act as delegates of their King? What is their brief watchword for the children of Zion? "THY GOD REIGNETH." Happier, more blessed words there cannot be. Messiah rules over His Church and over the nations. "Yet have I set my King on my holy hill of Zion." What a comfort to the Church universal! that all which concerns her is under His omnipotent supervision; that He is controlling every event for her ultimate welfare; that 'the sacramental host,' His true people

throughout all the world, need be in no trepidation—giving way like Israel in Egypt to precipitate panic; for in front and in rereward they have an Almighty guardian. And especially His ministers, ‘the armour-bearers of Jehovah,’ need never fear the ultimate success of their proclamation of the good tidings; for the battle is the Lord’s, and with His own glorious arm made bare, He will surely ‘bring Zion home.’

To the individual believer, and especially to the mourner in Zion, how cheering the assurance, that all which concerns him and his, is under the control and sovereignty of the Lord who died for him! On those gloomy, sterile mountains of trial, on which “every tree is burnt up, and all the green grass burnt up,” glad is this announcement, borne by the messengers of consolation. Other “good tidings of good” there are,—grander and more glorious gospel promises, embracing the hopes “full of immortality;” but how the soul, amid the ruins of its joy, the dust of its desolation, clings to this elementary truth,

that it was no capricious accident or chance which overturned its fondest fabric, and made "the city sit solitary that was full of people ;" but that every form of outer calamity—fever and disease, lightning and tempest, plague, pestilence, and famine, are so many arrows in the quiver of God. "Zion! *thy God reigneth!*"

We may not now see the wisdom and faithfulness of many of His dealings. We may even, at times, lose the presence and footsteps of the great Sovereign Ruler, and amid baffling and mysterious dispensations, the cry of the smitten heart may be, "Verily Thou art a God that hidest Thyself." But the arm now slumbering will in due time "awake ;" the arm now concealed will in due time be "made bare ;" the purposes now hidden will be unfolded ; and each of the children of Zion will come to join in that mighty pæan, whose ever-augmenting echoes are likened, in the Book of Revelation, to "the sound of many waters and the noise of

mighty thunderings"—"ALLELUIA, FOR THE
LORD GOD OMNIPOTENT REIGNETH!"

"Know well, my soul, God's hand controls
Whate'er thou fearest ;
Round Him in calmest music rolls
Whate'er thou hearest.

And that cloud itself, which now before thee
Lies dark in view,
Shall, with beams of light from the inner glory,
Be stricken through."

"Up, up ! the day is breaking.
Say to thy cares, Good-night !
Thy troubles from thee shaking,
Like dreams in day's fresh light.

Thou wearest not the crown,
Nor the best course can tell ;
God sitteth on the throne,
And guideth all things well.

In thy right hand to-morrow,
Thy God shall place the palms ;
To Him who chased thy sorrow,
How glad will be thy psalms !"

"IN THE MULTITUDE OF MY THOUGHTS WITHIN ME
THY COMFORTS DELIGHT MY SOUL."

"Behold, my Servant shall prosper,
 Shall rise, and be exalted and high exceedingly.
 As many were shocked at Him (*Barnes*)
 (So disfigured, His appearance was not human (*Delitzsch*),
 And His form not like that of the sons of men) :
 So shall He sprinkle many nations.

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Who hath believed our report ('our hearing,' *Septuagint*
 and *Vulgate*) ?

And the arm of JEHOVAH, to whom has it been revealed?
 For He groweth up in their sight like a slender sucker,
 And like a root from a thirsty soil (*Lowth*) :
 He hath no form nor comeliness ; and we looked,
 And there was no appearance such that we would find
 pleasure in Him (*Delitzsch*).

Despised, and the most abject of men ;
 Full of sufferings, and recognised only by His wounds
 (*Michælis*) ;

And like one from whom men hide their faces :
 He was despised, and we esteemed Him not.
 Surely our sicknesses He bore, and our griefs He carried :
 Yet we thought Him plagued, marked out by the stroke of
 God, and thrown down (*Michælis*).

But He was pierced for our transgressions,
 He was crushed for our iniquities :
And JEHOVAH hath made to fall (rush) upon Him the iniqui-
ties of us all."

—ISAIAH lii. 13-15 ; liii. 1-4

XX.

“Comfort ye, comfort ye my people,
saith your God.”

“The Lord hath laid on Him the iniquity of us all.”

—ISAIAH liii. 6.

The Great
Sufferer.

OUR translators have unquestionably been unfortunate in severing the last three verses of the 52d chapter from chapter 53d. The two combined, form one unique and perfect prophecy, which should be preserved in its entirety.

The passage, thus considered, may be said, without qualification, to be the most interesting in Old Testament scripture. It is an epitomised gospel—a touching Story of THE PASSION—a faithful prehistoric record of “the sufferings of Christ, and the glory that should follow.” No wonder it should be spoken of, by one great

writer, as 'the chief constellation in the prophetic firmament,' or that Luther should exhort all to "commit it to memory, for the strengthening of their faith." No wonder that scepticism should have fought its hard battle, either to have these evangelical utterances eliminated from the sacred page, or else to distort their plain and obvious interpretation. As to the allegation of some, that this prophecy was interpolated by Christians subsequent to the gospel age, and consequently to the events foretold,—it is sufficient to remark, that such a disingenuous statement carries its own refutation, inasmuch as we find the entire passage contained in the Septuagint translation of the Bible, which was completed by Alexandrian Jews, in the reign of Ptolemy Philadelphus, between two and three hundred years before the Christian era, and circulated in all quarters of the world. Moreover, the Jew would have prevented the possibility of any such forgery ; for he was singularly jealous alike of the integrity of the holy writings and

of the glory of the expected Messiah of his nation, with regard to whom all his ideas were utterly at variance with the picture of the lowly Sufferer here delineated. So much so, that he would willingly have expunged the passage if he could, and, indeed, as Hebrews of a later age, in defiance of all authority and historical criticism, have attempted to do. So far, however, from this, we find that the ancient Jewish expositors themselves, were forced to concede its application to the person and work of Messiah. The Arabic version has a break after the verses immediately preceding, followed by the title, "A Prophecy concerning Christ; His crucifixion, and the taking away of sins" (*Wordsw.*) This, it will be remembered, was the portion of Holy Scripture which engrossed the attention of the Ethiopian eunuch in the desert of Gaza. Philip, on seating himself in the chariot, and taking the same words as his text, did not hesitate as to its one legitimate interpretation—"He began at the same Scrip-

ture, and preached unto him *Jesus*" (Acts viii. 35).

Independent, indeed, of other four distinct references of this passage to Christ in the New Testament, the whole scope and peculiarity of the language, negatives the attempted application either to the personified nation of Israel or to any individual prophet or martyr. The inspired writer, speaking in the name of the First person in the adorable Trinity, commences with the arresting word "Behold!"—the term usually employed by him when he has some announcement to make of startling significance. Moreover, he introduces this episode of tragic and superhuman suffering and sorrow with a note of exultation: the crown rises above the cross—"Behold, my Servant shall deal prudently" (or 'shall prosper'—*margin*), "He shall be exalted and extolled, and be very high" (lii. 13). He institutes a comparison in what follows. As there would be those who would be "astonished" at His awful humiliation, His

marred visage, and mangled form ; so would many rejoice when, as the mighty Saviour, He would "sprinkle" the world's nations, as their great atoning Priest, with His blood, and cause its subject kings to bow in obeisance at His feet (vers. 14, 15).

So profound and appalling, however, was to be that humiliation—so unlike the august Being already depicted in the earlier pages of Isaiah's prophecy as "Wonderful, Counsellor, the Mighty God, the Everlasting Father, the Prince of Peace" (Isa. ix. 6)—that the seer knows his words will be received with scornful incredulity (ver. 1)—"Who hath believed our report? and to whom is the arm of the Lord revealed?" The Church had shortly before given utterance to the prayer, "Awake, awake, O arm of the Lord." It had invoked that arm to "awake as in ancient times" (the grand epic age of the passage of the Red Sea and the Jordan); and now that the prayer is heard, and that holy arm has been made bare,—how seem-

ing strange that it should be in the apparently most abject weakness of suffering humanity—in the person of a lowly Man of Sorrows; One (as the word has been translated) “disfigured with grief,” as if the very beauty of a perfect ideal manhood were so scarred and mutilated with oppressive and continuous woe, as to be unrecognisable; the poignant, inner soul-distress leaving its deep traces on the broken, mangled, outer frame. The previous prophecy might have led us, as the most appropriate answer to the prayer, to look for the emblem of some mighty ‘Cedar of God’ (*Michælis*). Instead of that, we have “a tender plant, a root” (or sucker, growing from a felled tree) “out of the dry ground.” The previous prophecy might have led us to picture a mighty Prince, the great antitype of Cyrus, with glittering diadem on His brow, and splendid rétinue at His side, decked in those robes of royalty so captivating in the eyes of orientals. Instead of this, there is no “form,” no “comeliness,” no “beauty.”

Fame, as in the case of other conquerors, blows no trumpet before Him. "He is despised," and "the most abject of men" (*Hengstenberg*). There is (*lit.*) "a hiding of faces from Him." "They esteemed Him not;" or, as Luther interprets it, "estimated Him at nothing" (vers. 2, 3). The ancients, Jews as well as heathens, regarded severe suffering as the personal retribution for personal sin. "Surely,"—said the persecutors of Job, as they pointed to the miserable couch of ashes on which he lay,—“Surely such are the dwellings of the wicked, and this is the place of him that knoweth not God” (Job xviii. 21). So also, in a later age, the barbarians of Malta, when they saw the viper fastening on the hand of St Paul, imagined he was an escaped criminal, who had eluded a watery grave, but whom the Divine vengeance would not suffer to live on land. So, says the prophet, was this Man of Sorrows esteemed, as “stricken, smitten of God” (ver. 4)—smitten as with a loathsome leprosy,—the curse-mark of judicial vengeance

upon Him (for so it is rendered by St Jerome, "We thought Him to be a leper"), branded with the divine malediction, a sufferer from some fearful transgression unknown to his fellows!*

But this 'despising' and 'rejecting' and 'hiding' and 'curse,' have another and far different explanation, in the principle of *vicarious* sacrifice. In a singular plenitude (almost reiteration) of language and expression, the idea of substitutionary

* Should this reference to the leper's curse be the correct one, to a Jew—to an Oriental, it must have conveyed the saddest idea which human language could possibly give of abject suffering. The most doleful memory which the writer has of a brief sojourn at Jerusalem, is in connection with the row of lepers outside the Jaffa gate, with mutilated arms and fingers outstretched for alms. How awful to think, in any sense of the words,—'Such is a picture of the humiliation of the Son of God and Lord of glory!' "He was counted as a leper!"—"We hid, as it were, our faces from Him:" just as travellers, to this hour, turn, with averted head, as if to hide their eyes from the painful spectacle. And when, still farther, we remember the disease was regarded, as has just been noted, to be a direct infliction of God, what a deeper and intenser element of woe have we added! "Have pity upon me, have pity upon me, O ye my friends; for the *hand of God* hath (stricken me) touched me" (Job xix. 21). "I am a worm, and no man; a reproach of men, and despised of the people" (Ps. xxii. 6).

suffering permeates the entire prophecy ; pointing to a load of anguish borne, not for His own sins, but for those of others,—anguish without approach or parallel in the annals of human endurance. “Surely He hath borne our griefs and carried” (as the great antitypical Scapegoat of the Levitical economy) “our sorrows.” “The Lord hath laid upon Him” (or, like the confluence of mighty waters, “caused to rush in upon Him”), not His own iniquities, but “the iniquities of us all” (vers. 4, 6). “He was wounded” (*margin*, ‘tormented’), but it was “for *our* transgressions;” “He was bruised,” but it was “for *our* iniquities;” He was “chastised,” but it was “for *our* peace” (ver. 5). His very stripes (the livid bruises or marks, as the word means, which by scourge and buffeting had disfigured His body), were the blessed symbols of our everlasting healing—“With His stripes we are healed.” The whole strange, bloody ritual of the Levitical economy had its exponent and interpreter in Him who was

“brought as a lamb to the slaughter” (ver. 7). It is this punitive character of His sufferings that can alone unravel an otherwise mystery of woe, and give in any degree an adequate explanation of such words as these—“Yet it pleased the Lord to bruise Him” (or, “painfully to crush Him”—*Hengstenberg*); “He hath put Him to grief” (ver. 10). Dissevered from this vicarious or piacular element, the righteousness and holiness and equity of God would be impeached by an apparent redundancy of anguish heaped on a Guiltless head.

Come, and let us marvel and adore, as we contemplate this mysterious doctrine: the sinless, immaculate Saviour bearing our iniquities, dying in our room and stead, “the just for the unjust, that He might bring us unto God.” Truly such a “plan of salvation,” in effecting the world’s ransom, is beyond the ken and cognisance of human reason. If there be one way, indeed, more than another, in which God’s thoughts are not man’s thoughts, nor God’s

ways man's ways, it is in this divinely unfolded method, by which He, who declares that He can "by no means clear," can yet (in perfect consistency with His high attributes, and with every principle of His moral government), "clear the guilty." "Oh the unspeakable greatness of the exchange," exclaims one of the leading spirits of Germany in the era of the Reformation, as he pondered this most wondrous of revealed verities,—*"the sinless One is condemned, and he that is guilty goes free; the Blessing bears the curse, and the curse is brought into blessing; the Life dies, and the dead live; and he that knows nothing but confusion of face is clothed with glory."* "He gives me," says Luther, "what is His, and I give Him what is mine. I give Him all my sins, and He gives me back in exchange all His righteousness." If Isaiah ever stood amid the crowd of the Temple-court on the Great day of expiation, when the live goat had the iniquities of the whole nation of Israel confessed over its

devoted head, and was afterwards led across the green slopes of Olivet, away amid the desolate regions of the Dead Sea shore—‘the land not inhabited’—never more to return;—what a vivid reality would the sight impart to his own varied utterances in this chapter! What emphatic beauty and reality would be given to the words of a contemporary prophet—“The iniquity of Israel shall be sought for, and there shall be none; and the sins of Judah, and they shall not be found (Jer. l. 20).

Let us, too, hear a divine voice rising from the great sacrificial altar—“I will be merciful to your unrighteousness; your sins and your iniquities will I remember no more:” and, in conjunction with that, the touching appeal which a great religious painter has put under his picture of the bleeding, thorn-crowned Sufferer—“I HAVE BORNE THESE THINGS FOR THEE—WHAT HAST THOU DONE FOR ME?”*

* This impressive picture of Corregio’s is in the Royal Gallery of Munich. The rope which binds the hands of the

“O shame beyond the bitterest thought
That evil spirit ever framed,
That sinners know what Jesus wrought,
Yet feel their haughty hearts untamed !
Lord of my heart, by Thy last cry,
Let not Thy blood on earth be spent :
Lo ! at Thy feet I fainting lie,
Mine eyes upon Thy wounds are bent.
Wash me, and dry these bitter tears,
Nor let my spirit farther roam ;
'Tis Thine, by vows, and hopes, and fears,
Long since :—oh ! call Thy wanderer home ;
To that dear home, safe in Thy wounded side,
Where only broken hearts their sin and shame
may hide.”

“IN THE MULTITUDE OF MY THOUGHTS WITHIN ME
THY COMFORTS DELIGHT MY SOUL.”

Divine Victim is represented as depending over the Latin inscription—

“Ego, pro te, hæc passus sum ;
Tu vero quid fecisti pro Me ?”

"The punishment was laid upon Him for our peace;
 And by His bruises we are healed.
 All we like sheep were astray;
 We had turned aside every one to his own way;
 And JEHOVAH crushed us, *וְיְהוָה שָׁחַס* (crush) upon Him the iniquities
of us all.
 It was enacted, and He was made answerable, yet He opened
 not His mouth (*Lameth*):
 Like a lamb which is led to the slaughter-bench,
 And as a sheep before her shearers
 Is dumb, so He opened not His mouth. . . .
 For the wickedness of my people punishment fell on Him
 (*Delitzsch*), . . .
 Although He had done no wrong
 Neither was there any guile in His mouth.
 Yet it pleased the Lord painfully to crush Him (*Hengstenberg*);
 When His soul shall make a propitiatory sacrifice (*Louth*),
 He shall see a seed, He shall prolong his days,
 And the purpose of JEHOVAH shall prosper through His
 hand (*Delitzsch*).
*Of the travail of His soul, He shall see (the fruit) and shall
 be satisfied."*

—ISAIAH liii. 5-11.

XXI.

**“Comfort ye, comfort ye my people,
saith your God.”**

“The Lord hath laid upon Him the iniquity of us all. . . .
He shall see His seed. . . . He shall see of the travail
of His soul, and shall be satisfied.”

—ISAIAH liii. 6, 10, 11.

IN the preceding exposition, we
suffering found that the Prophet’s remark-
and Victory. able utterances had their only true
explanation in the expiatory sacrifice of the
great Redeemer—the divine Surety-Substitute—
on whose guiltless head the Lord had laid the
burden of His people’s transgressions; “who,”
in the language of St Peter, as he quotes or
paraphrases the words of this chapter, “His
own self bare our sins in His own body on the
tree; . . . by whose stripes ye were healed”

(1 Pet. ii. 24); who Himself, in the days of His flesh, declared, that, as the Son of man, He came "to give His life a ransom for many;" and that "thus it behoved Christ to suffer" (Luke xxiv. 46).

We may only farther observe, before leaving the subject, that the alternative theory of "the Cross and Passion"—viz., that the Adorable Sufferer yielded His life merely as an Example—is, in itself, altogether inadequate and unsatisfactory in the light of the strong language employed in this chapter;—language which had its counterpart and fulfilment in the mysterious anguish of Gethsemane and Calvary, the bloody sweat, the strong crying and tears, the horror of great darkness, and the Eloi cry. But admit that He drank the cup of *penal* woe,—that "Messiah was cut off, but not for Himself,"—then, such phrases and assertions as those on which we have already commented, become perspicuous and intelligible:—"the most abject of men;" "marked out by the stroke of

God" (*Michælis*); like one "from whom men hide their faces;" seeing of the "*travail* of His soul;" whom "it pleased the Lord painfully to bruise;" and on whom "Jehovah caused to meet the iniquity of us all." These utterances, moreover, are abundantly attested and confirmed by other kindred authoritative declarations of Scripture; as when He is said to have been "delivered for our offences;" to have redeemed us from the curse of the law by submitting to be made a curse for us; that He was made "to be sin for us, who knew no sin;" that He "hath loved us, and hath given Himself FOR US, an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweet smelling savour" (Rom. iv. 25; Gal. iii. 13; 2 Cor. v. 21; Eph. v. 2).

But this same deeply-interesting passage, which so minutely describes His abasement and humiliation, closes with the sublime picture of His triumph over death, and His session at the right hand of the Father;—"dividing" (as

Luther renders it) "the strong as a spoil" (ver. 12); taking "the strong man armed," stripping him of "his armour wherein he trusted," and restoring the immortal souls he had taken captive at his will. The victorious conqueror (ascended to His Father's right hand), sees of the fruit of the travail of His soul, and is satisfied; the anticipated immortal harvest, waving throughout the world to His glory, fills His heart with joy.

The portion of Old Testament scripture most similar and akin to this, is that beautiful 22d Psalm, which a commentator has appropriately designated "Messiah bearing the Cross and wearing the Crown" (*Bonar*), and towards the close of which it is predicted, "A seed shall serve Him" (ver. 30); a declaration almost identical with the words of Isaiah, "He shall see His seed." In both cases the reference is to His spiritual offspring—those over whom He is yet to pronounce the joyful words on the Great day, "Behold I, and the children which

God hath given me" (Heb. ii. 13). We are more familiar, indeed, with the gospel metaphor of Jesus as the *Brother*-man—His breast glowing with fraternal sympathy to the human race, whom He is not ashamed to call His "brethren" (Heb. ii. 11). But His *parental* relationship was not strange, at all events to the prophet Isaiah, who, in an earlier prediction, as we have previously noted, had foretold Him as "the everlasting Father" (ix. 6). Nor can we fail to see that there was a meetness and congruity in the appellation, when we remember that as Adam, the first great parent of all, stood the natural representative of the race,—so He who is spoken of as "the second Adam, the Lord from heaven," is the head, or representative 'Father' of that redeemed family which He is to gather out of every tribe and tongue and kindred and nation. The highest blessing, it has been well observed, promised to Abraham, was that he was to be "the father of many nations" (*Barnes*). The greatest blessing,—the highest recompense and

reward, promised to a mightier than the Father of the Faithful, was the birth of a vast spiritual progeny. That seed, moreover, he was "to see" (ver. 10). Unlike another illustrious Old Testament type, who was not privileged to behold the people he loved inheriting the possessions of the earthly Canaan,—who was vouchsafed a Pisgah-glimpse—no more,—the Great Antitype was to witness the ingathered host of His purchased Israel spread over the hills and the valleys of the spiritual Canaan; or, in the imagery of the pastoral Psalm immediately following that of the Passion (to which we have just alluded),—as the Shepherd-King He was to behold His ransomed flock gathered around Him,—causing them to lie down in green pastures, and leading them beside the still waters, in the regions of the blest.

If we go to the New Testament, the Apostle's words form a similar appropriate commentary on the twofold representation here given us,—the humiliation and exaltation, the sufferings and

the victory, the cross and the crown. "Who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God ; But made Himself of no reputation, and took upon Him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men : And being found in fashion as a man, He humbled Himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross. Wherefore God also hath highly exalted Him, and given Him a name which is above every name : That at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth ; And that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father" (Phil. ii. 6-11) ; or yet again, "Looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith ; who, for the joy that was set before Him, endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God" (Heb. xii. 2).

And finally, we have the most impressive commentary of all, in the beautiful simile of our

blessed Lord Himself, when, in speaking of 'the great decease He was about to accomplish,' He says, "Except a corn of wheat fall into the ground and die, it abideth alone: but if it die, it bringeth forth much fruit" (John xii. 24), words in which He allows outer nature simply but graphically to unfold the mystery of His approaching oblation. He employs the metaphor of the seed-corn dropped into the ground, and the new and more exuberant growth springing from the apparent death and destruction of the inserted grain—(that 'one' seed becoming the germ of a thousand harvests). He, the true "Corn of wheat," might indeed have "abode alone" in the granary of Heaven. He might have declined the great act of self-sacrifice, and left the world and its millions to their fate. He needed no "nations of the saved," in order to augment His own independent happiness and glory. But if He accept the other alternative, and by a voluntary self-surrender resolve on "saving others," "Himself He can-

not save." "The way to the seed's multiplication and to Christ's glorification is the same—viz., by the law of death" (*Alford*). That alternative, however, *is* accepted. The divine Corn of wheat has fallen into the ground and died; and as a glorious consequence, "He shall see His seed." That buried grain will "bring forth much fruit:" it will germinate into a rich and abundant harvest for the garnerers of immortality. "This," says He, "is the Father's will who hath sent me, that of all which He hath given me I should lose nothing, but should raise it up again at the last day" (John vi. 39). To employ a kindred illustration, He, the Tree of life, who might have "abode alone" (as He had done from a past eternity in the Heavenly Paradise), has bowed, a willing sacrifice, to the inflexible righteousness and holiness of God: but, like some noble denizen of an earthly forest, which, when it comes with a crash to the earth, scatters its seeds all around; so Jesus, by dying, has scattered far and wide the seeds of imperishable

life, and "the leaves of the Tree are for the healing of the nations." That healing, indeed, is still so far prophetic; that mighty predicted harvest has as yet been limited and partial. We can yet only descry the first "handful of corn" "on the top of the mountains," whose fruit is one day to "shake like Lebanon" (Ps. lxxii. 16). But the eye of faith is carried forward to the world's great harvest-home—the true Feast of ingathering—when the saying of the oldest Messianic prophecy shall have its glorious and complete fulfilment—"Unto Him shall the gathering of the people be" (Gen. xlix. 10); or, taking the other interpretation of the figure (Christ as a spiritual parent, "bringing many sons unto glory"), "He shall see of the travail of His soul, and shall be satisfied."

What a storehouse of wondrous consolation is contained in this remarkable chapter! With what feelings must its mysterious utterances have been read by the captive Jews on the banks

of the Euphrates! How it must have dried all tears and hushed all misgivings, when their thoughts were thus directed to their Messiah Himself as *a mighty Fellow-sufferer*! What were *their* tears of bondage to His? What were these years of loneliness and exile, compared to the treading alone, by Him, of the winepress of Jehovah's wrath? How it must have imparted a lofty consecration to their grief, that One was here revealed, who was to participate in their deepest experiences of desolation. While, on the other hand, the intimation of His resurrection and triumph, and of His carrying away "the spoil from the spoiler," would be to them a pledge and earnest that the day was coming when their chains would be broken, and when their city would rise from its ruins.

What a source, too, of unutterable solace to God's tried children—still hanging their harps of sadness on the willows, refusing all earthly comfort—to think, not only that they are treading the very path their Lord and Master did,

but how little their intensest sorrows are, compared to those which bowed the spirit of the Great Redeemer, the Captain of their salvation, who was "*made perfect through suffering!*" What an example and pattern of meek un murmuring resignation! the Lám b of God "dumb before His shearers," "opening not His mouth," pursuing with unfaltering step the path of appointed trial, until He could exclaim, "It is finished!"

In His case, that Cross and Passion led to glory; the result of that fierce travail of soul was the birth of a great universal Church, and His own enthronement as Lord of all. So, as one with this once suffering but now living Lord, His people shall be brought at last to sit with Him on His throne, even as He also overcame, and sat down with His Father on His throne. Let all such, in their land of sorrowing exile, listen to the heavenly strain stealing on their ears from the lips of earth's greatest Sufferer—" *Comfort ye, comfort ye my people;*" for was there ever sorrow like unto my sorrow? and will ye

not be contented patiently to bear your cross for me, seeing I have borne such a cross for you? "*Comfort ye, comfort ye!*" for I here give you the comfort of all comforts, peace through the blood of that cross;—the pledge and assurance that I have cancelled your transgressions, myself enduring their punishment; I have given my soul an offering for your sin' (ver. 10).

"He shall see of the travail of His soul!" He looks forward, from the distant age at which the Prophet wrote, to these birthpangs of Calvary as to the natal-day of a ransomed Church, and a ransomed creation. According to His own subsequent figure, a figure probably suggested by this same prophetic note of Isaiah—"A woman when she is in travail hath sorrow, because her hour is come; but as soon as she is delivered of the child, she remembereth no more the anguish, for joy that a man is born into the world" (John xvi. 21). He is "satisfied!" Small things will satisfy a small mind. It re-

quires great things to satisfy a great mind. What must be required to satisfy the mind of an angel? above all, what must be required to satisfy the mind of God? The salvation of ruined mankind does so! This Almighty Sufferer, from the heights of His glorified exaltation, looks down on the earth He has redeemed, and says, 'It is enough; I am satisfied. It is meet I should be glad, for this my prodigal world was dead, and is alive again; it was lost, and is found.'

" Stretched on the cross, the bolts of heaven
Are on the spotless Victim hurled;
The rocks proclaim, in fragments riven,
'He bears the burden of a world!'

Around Him darkness spreads her pall,
As if creation's knell had rung;
The sun forbade his light to fall,
Where his Almighty Maker hung.

In vain the quivering lips implored:
'My God! my God!' in vain He cries;
Justice unsheathes her glittering sword,
And claims the bleeding sacrifice."

"'Tis done ! the mighty work is done,
Messiah bows His thorn-crowned head ;
The fight is fought, the battle won,
Captivity is captive led.

The Sufferer once, the Victor now,
Through everlasting years adored ;
With many crowns upon His brow,
He reigns the universal Lord.

And counting o'er the muster-roll
Of the Redeemed for whom He died,
He 'sees the travail of His soul,'
And seeing, He is 'satisfied.'"

"IN THE MULTITUDE OF MY THOUGHTS WITHIN ME
THY COMFORTS DELIGHT MY SOUL."

"Exult, O barren one, that didst not bear ;
 Break forth into joyful shouting, and cry aloud, thou that
 durst not travail :
 For there are more children of the solitary one
 Than children of the married, saith JEHOVAH.
 Enlarge the place of thy tent,
 And let them stretch out the curtains of thy habitations :
 Hinder it not, lengthen thy cords,
 And firmly fix thy stakes (*Lowth*) :
 For on the right hand and on the left shalt thou burst forth
 with increase ;
 And thy seed will take possession of nations,
 And they shall inhabit the desolate cities.

.
 For thy husband is thy Maker ;
 JEHOVAH, God of Hosts, is His name ;
 And thy Redeemer the Holy One of Israel ;
 The God of the whole earth shall He be called.

.
 For a little moment have I forsaken thee ;
 But with great mercies will I receive thee again.
 In a short wrath I hid my face a moment from thee ;
 But in everlasting kindness will I have mercy upon thee.

.
*Wretched, storm-tossed, comfortless (Alexander) ;
 Behold, I lay thy stones in cement of vermillion (or stibium)
 (Lowth),
 And I will found thee upon sapphires.
 And make thy minarets (battlements) of ruby ;
 And thy gates of sparkling gems,
 And all thy boundary walls of jewels (stones of pleasure)"*
 (*Delitzsch and Alexander*).

—ISAIAH liv. 1-3, 5, 7, 8, 11, 12.

XXII.

**“Comfort ye, comfort ye my people,
saith your God.”**

“O thou afflicted, tossed with tempest, and not comforted !
behold, I will lay thy stones with fair colours, and lay thy
foundations with sapphires. And I will make thy windows
of agates, and thy gates of carbuncles, and all thy borders
of pleasant stones.”

—ISAIAH liv. 11, 12.

**The House
Beautiful.**

THESE are figurative words of comfort, in a chapter full of consolation.

In the former one, the foundation of all comfort had been laid in the unfolding of Messiah's Person and sufferings, His death, resurrection, and exaltation. By a natural sequence, the Prophet proceeds to erect a divine structure. On 'the Rock Christ' he builds the Church, detailing the history of its rise, growth, and ultimate glory; from a small and unpro-

misgiving beginning, widening and expanding until it becomes coextensive with the world. The soul-travail of the preceding context is followed by the birth of this spiritual offspring.

The figures he employs are varied and expressive. If taken in chronological order, the earliest appropriate emblem of the Church, in its militant state, is the Ark in the waters,—the ark of Noah, “tossed with tempest, and not comforted” (ver. 9, 11), in which eight souls represented the feeble aggregate of believers. In the dawn of the New Testament dispensation, “the number of the disciples, together,” gathered in their upper room in Jerusalem, “was an hundred and twenty.” Vain seemed the thought that that handful of unskilled mariners and their fragile vessel could ride out the storm. “The mountains,” as at the time of the Deluge, seemed to have “departed,” and “the hills” to be “removed” (ver. 10). The cry of the affrighted crew was “Lord, save us—we perish!” But that cry was heard. As the

name "Noah" signifies "comfort," so did the true Noah, the Redeeming Comforter, as He caused the bow of heaven to span the lowering sky, utter the reassuring words, "*Comfort ye, comfort ye my people;*"—giving, too, as a blessed equivalent for His own departure, "another Comforter," who would abide with them for ever (John xiv. 16).

The next figure is that of a 'tent' or 'tabernacle' (ver. 2). It recalls the Church's moveable condition in the wilderness of Sinai of old, or in the times of the Judges and the earlier monarchy, when "the Ark abode within curtains,"—that again, an emblem of its apparently insecure, unprotected, unsettled state in a wilderness world. But despite of the figurative Amalekites and Hittites, the Canaanites and Jebusites and Philistines—the hordes of spiritual foes who have led the assault,—not only has it been protected, but it has "mightily grown and prevailed." Its marvellous increase and expansion by the accession of the Gentiles is

specially referred to. The solitary, long childless mother is represented as breaking forth into singing over her countless offspring (ver. 1). The old tenting-place is insufficient to contain the teeming multitudes. The tent-pegs are wrenched from the ground, the ropes are lengthened, the canvas is stretched; for "the God of the whole earth" is JEHOVAH now to be called (ver. 5). "Enlarge the place of thy tent, and let them stretch forth the curtains of thine habitations: spare not, lengthen thy cords, and strengthen thy stakes: For thou shalt break forth on the right hand and on the left; and thy seed shall inherit the Gentiles" (vers. 2, 3).

But there is one other step in this grand development. The Ark of God, hitherto migratory, must have a permanent dwelling. The shifting tabernacle must have an enduring temple, crowning Mount Moriah;—a temple composed of costliest workmanship: of cedar and pomegranate, marble and gold and silver; windows of agate, and gates of polished brass.

This, again, is the type and symbol of a still grander unity. The Church on earth, in its present condition, with its temporary ropes, its curtains and stakes (perishable material, all subject to become the sport of the elements, often shattered by the tempests of human persecution and hate), is to have its perfected anti-type in the glories of the Heavenly temple, where all that is fragile and transient is to be succeeded by the enduring and the imperishable (ver. 11, 12)—“O thou afflicted, tossed with tempest, and not comforted! behold, I will lay thy stones with fair colours, and lay thy foundations with sapphires. And I will make thy windows of agates, and thy gates of carbuncles, and all thy borders of pleasant stones.”*

And this is an equally beautiful picture of the growth and development of every true believer, from the infancy to the full manhood and

* See Bishop Wordsworth's Notes *in loc.*

maturity of his spiritual being. As in the world's early days, so it may be with him in the morning of the new life, he may be like an ark tossed on the waves of sin and sorrow, "deep calling unto deep;" but God sets His bow in the cloud, spans His early sky with the arc of covenant promise. The "tempest-tossed and not comforted" is consoled by the true Noah; and in the cradle and childhood of his spiritual experience, the words sound like a lullaby of love, "As one whom his mother comforteth, so will I comfort you:"—"I will not leave you comfortless!" Another stage onwards, and his pilgrim-life has its best emblem in the tenting-ground of wandering Israel of old. All is a shifting, movable scene:—the tent, pitched to-day, is struck to-morrow:—change is his portion here; and however varied the sites of his earthly encampments, at last the same tale has to be told—this "house of his earthly tabernacle" is "taken down." He may possibly escape some forms of "the windy storm and tempest," but

the hand of death at last pulls up the pegs, coils the ropes, and folds the canvas. The spoiler's voice is sooner or later heard, "Remove the place of thy tent;" and in the words of another prophet, the cry ascends, "Suddenly are my tents spoiled, and my curtains in a moment" (Jer. iv. 20). But with him, too, there is a third sequence and development, "a building of God, an house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens." The mutable, unstable tent-life is to have its nobler, grander counterpart in the palace of the Great King, the enduring Temple of the Jerusalem above, the glory of which is here symbolised by all that is precious and gorgeous in stones and colours. The God who promises it, reveals Himself specially in this chapter as a Covenant-God. He reverts to His covenant of *providence* in the days of Noah, as a pledge of the fulfilment of His covenant of grace (ver. 9)—"For this is as the waters of Noah unto me: for as I have sworn that the waters of Noah should no more go over the

earth; so have I sworn that I would not be wroth with thee, nor rebuke thee." He sets that brilliant bow in the cloud, as the pledge and emblem that earth would never again be visited by deluge. For five thousand years, summer and winter, and seed-time and harvest, and day and night have not ceased (Gen. viii. 22). There has been no gap in the unvarying succession, no pause in the magnificent march of the seasons. The mountains have never again departed, the hills have never again been removed; and this faithful God in the world of nature will be equally true and faithful in fulfilling all the provisions of the new and better covenant (ver. 10)—"My kindness shall not depart from thee, neither shall the covenant of my peace be removed, saith the Lord that hath mercy on thee."

It is the most glorious and sustaining of truths this unchangeableness of Jehovah in His purposes of love, alike to His Church collectively and to believers individually. No wonder

the Prophet loves so often to dwell on it. Well he knew how much we need the inspiring, invigorating assurance. Is it the Church collectively? Alas! how often has it been thus "driven by the wind and tossed," seeking comfort and rest, and apparently finding none; subjected to fierce persecution, its blood spilt as water; the despots of the earth forging the chain, and the bigots of the earth rearing the dungeon and the rack. Paganism, Mohammedanism, Romanism, Infidelity, each with its separate wave breaking on the labouring vessel's side, or straining its anchors. But though persecuted, she has never been forsaken; though cast down, she has never been destroyed. God writes a motto for her at the close of this chapter, "No weapon that is formed against thee shall prosper" (ver. 17). The very evils which befall her are permitted by Him, as needed discipline and chastisement, "*I* have created the waster to destroy" (Isa. liv. 16). Is it believers individually? How often are they subjected to "a

great fight of afflictions :”—the allurements of the world, the corruptions of their hearts, the trials and sorrows of this chequered scene, tempted to misinterpret God's dealings, and to imagine in their unworthy dejection and despondency that He has hid His face from them so that He will not hear. O ye of little faith! wherefore do ye doubt? God has, in this chapter of wondrous comforts, a message for *you*. He would assure you, if you will only credit His word, that He is far more ready to pity and forgive, to love and to pardon, to welcome and save, than to withdraw His face in anger. Mark the contrast—the antithesis, between the “small forsakings” and the “great gatherings,” the “little wrath” and the “enduring kindness.” “For a small moment have I forsaken thee: but with great mercies will I gather thee. In a little wrath I hid my face from thee for a moment; but with everlasting kindness will I have mercy on thee” (vers. 7, 8).

Up then, desponding ones! Trust this unfailing Jehovah. If the covenant rested with us, there could be nothing but insecurity. But its promises depend on the word of Him who cannot lie. Go on, living your life of faith and loving confidence, pitching, wherever He calls you, your pilgrim-tent; not downcast though your canvas flutter, and the ropes be strained, and the pegs loosened by sudden storms. He takes all these ways to remind you that this is not your rest, that yours is a nomad, itinerant life, that canvas shelter is not your true home. Have your eye on 'the Better country'—the 'many Mansions'—that glorious palace, purchased for you by the Great Sufferer, whose stones are fair colours, and its minarets and battlements (*Ferome*) glittering like rubies in the eternal sunlight—its walls salvation, its gates praise. God is set forth under various relations in this chapter—as your Maker (ver. 5), your Master (ver. 17), your Teacher (ver. 13), your Comforter (ver. 9), your Redeemer (ver.

5), your Husband (ver. 5), your Covenant-God (ver. 10). Then, how wondrous are the provisions made in the charter of spiritual blessings He bestows;—‘calling you’ (ver. 6), ‘shewing mercy’ (ver. 8), ‘gathering you’ (ver. 7), ‘guarding you’ (ver. 14), ‘teaching you’ (ver. 13), ‘comforting you’ (ver. 9), ‘giving peace’ (ver. 10), until His everlasting kindness leads you within the city which hath foundations, all whose borders are of pleasant stones. No wonder that in closing the chapter, after such an amazing enumeration, the Prophet should write, with a feeling of proud elation at privileges so vast and glorious, alike in possession and in reversion—“THIS IS THE HERITAGE OF THE SERVANTS OF THE LORD.”

“What to that for which we’re waiting
Is this glittering earthly toy?
Heavenly glory, holy splendour,
Sum of grandeur, sum of joy.
Not the light that leaves us darker,
Not the gleams that come and go,
Not the mirth whose end is madness,
Not the joy whose fruit is woe :

Not the notes that die at sunset,
Not the fashion of a day ;
But the everlasting beauty,
And the endless melody.
City of the pearl-bright portal ;
City of the jasper wall ;
City of the golden pavement ;
Seat of endless festival.
Soon where earthly beauty blinds not,
No excess of brilliance palls,
Salem, city of the holy,
We shall be within thy walls !
There, beside yon crystal river,
There, beneath life's wondrous tree,
There, with naught to cloud or sever,
Ever with the Lamb to be !
Heir of glory,
That shall be for thee and me !”

“ IN THE MULTITUDE OF MY THOUGHTS WITHIN ME
THY COMFORTS DELIGHT MY SOUL.”

*"Ho! every thirsty one, come ye to the waters,
 And ye that have no silver (Lowth): come ye, buy and eat,
 Yea, come, buy ye without silver,
 And without payment, wine and milk.*
 Wherefore do ye weigh out silver for that which is not bread?
 And the result of your labour for that which is not to satisfaction?
 Hearken, bearken to me, and eat that which is truly good,
 And your soul shall feast itself with the richest delicacies (*Lowth*).

.
 For my thoughts are not your thoughts,
 Neither are your ways my ways, saith JEHOVAH.
 For as the Heavens are higher than the earth,
 So are my ways higher than your ways,
 And my thoughts than your thoughts.

.
 Surely with joy shall ye go forth,
 And in peace shall ye be led onward :
 The mountains and the hills shall break forth before you into a
 shout (*Alexander*),
 And all the trees of the field shall clap their hands.
 Instead of thorny shrubs will shoot up the cypress,
 And instead of the nettle (bramble) shall shoot up myrtles (*ib.*):
 And it shall be unto JEHOVAH for a memorial,
 For a perpetual sign that shall not be swept away."

—ISAIAH lv. 1, 2, 8, 9, 12, 13.

XXIII.

**“Comfort ye, comfort ye my people,
saith your God.”**

“Ho, every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters, and he that hath no money : come ye, buy and eat ; yea, come, buy wine and milk without money, and without price.”

—ISAIAH lv. i.

The WE have in this most beautiful
Universal chapter another step in the Pro-
Invitation. phet's sublime sequences, as he unfolds the Great Redemption-work of Messiah.

In chapter 53, the foundation-truths of Redemption were brought before us in the meritorious sufferings and atoning death of the Great Surety-Substitute. The altar was there erected, and the blood of the Prince of Martyrs was shed. In the expressive figure employed, He saw of the fruit of the travail of His soul, and was satisfied.

In chapter 54, immediately following, we had the next revelation in these divine picturings, presenting to us the result of Messiah's fierce travail-pangs in the birth of a glorious Church. In new, significant imagery there employed, we found the pegs of the tent unfastened, the ropes uncoiled, the stakes removed, the tent-curtains lengthened, in order to admit the vast spiritual progeny ;—nay, as if the emblem of the tent, appropriate to describe enlargement and extension, failed to depict her durability and comeliness, we found the Church farther represented under the figure of a costly Building, "garnished with all manner of stones after the similitude of a palace ;" while, at the same time, comfort on comfort is added,—Jehovah representing Himself as standing allied to His people in every endearing relationship, and guaranteeing, by various attractive figures, their safety, preservation, and peace. It is a magnificent picture of the purchase secured by the Redeemer's agony.

And now, having thus unfolded the strength of the foundations, and the grandeur of the structure,—the Palace or Temple (for it may be either) whose stones are “laid with fair colours: its windows of agates, its gates of carbuncles, and all its borders of pleasant stones,”—what remains, but for the speaker in the next and concluding sequence—this 55th chapter—to give to the favoured ones (whoever they are, for whom all these preparations are completed) the joyous welcome. The feast having been spread, the question is, For whom is it destined? who are the invited guests? To whom are these massive cedar gates to be thrown open? who are to be received within the banqueting-halls? Is it, as in the case of an earthly palace, only the few, the select, the privileged, the men of rank, the world’s spiritual aristocracy? Or, as for ages before, is access to be granted only to one favoured covenant nation?—are the children of Zion alone to be joyful in their King? No! every such monopoly is to be broken up. The

Gospel proclamation is without condition or qualification, without let or hindrance, for all mankind. Free as the light of the noonday sun; free as the rain which falls unbought from the clouds; free as the water by the wayside pool, or which laves the shore of lake or ocean;—so free is the entrance within the gate of this true “House” or Palace “Beautiful;”—so free are these purchased blessings of this “Salvation of God.” In chapter 53d, we beheld the Great Rock of Ages struck with the rod of Divine justice. Here, in chapter 55th, is the flowing forth of the streams of salvation from its clefts and crevices. As these precious streams gush forth in their glorious amplitude, the gracious invitation is addressed (ver. 1)—“Ho, every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters.” Moreover, as it is Christ the Divine Son who is specially brought before us in chapter 53d, as the Vicarious Sufferer; as it is God the Divine Father who is specially brought before us in chapter 54th, in His varied relations as Creator

and Maker, Husband, and Covenant-God ;—so, in this 55th chapter, it is God the Holy Ghost, the Glorifier of Christ, who may be supposed specially to issue this free, full, universal invitation, with the whole world as His auditory. It reminds us of the sublime kindred vision of Ezekiel. He saw a river bursting up in the midst of the Temple-courts, flowing through a valley cleft in the Mount of Olives, and carrying beauty and fertility on its banks wherever it went. Reaching the bleached shores of the Dead Sea, it made these sullen, briny waters, teem with life. So is it here : from that same glorious Temple, or rather its spiritual Antitype with its stones of priceless value, described in the preceding chapter, the river of salvation flows. No longer confined to the one Jewish sanctuary, a way is opened for it through every mountain barrier of earth. The world's desolate places are gladdened with the rushing tide, and its bleakest wildernesses beautified with life (Ezek. xlvii. 1-12).

Let us pause for a little over this comprehensive invitation, intimating that the Gospel of the Grace of God is free for all mankind. It is the parallel picture, in the Old Testament, of the mission-angel of Revelation flying with the everlasting Gospel to preach to every nation and kindred and tongue and people, scattering, in his flight, the leaves of that tree which are for the healing of the nations. ‘*Come* to the waters!’ It is the counterpart of the great New Testament words, “*Come* unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest” (Matt. xi. 28). “If any man thirst, let him *come* unto me, and drink” (John vii. 37). “Whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely” (Rev. xxii. 17). Man may erect his barriers around that fountain, God erects none. It is not, ‘*Come*’—but you must come by laboured preparation—by penance and fasting, by pilgrimage and mortification. It is not, ‘*Come*’—but you must come by the vestibule of Sacramentarian efficacy and priestly absolu-

tion. It is not, 'Come'—but you must come by dogma and rubric, by sect and shibboleth. Neither is it, 'Come'—but you must come with some golden or jewelled bucket to fetch up the water; you must come like Naaman of old, laden with costly offerings, talents of silver and gold, and changes of raiment. But, 'Come,' just as you are, "without money and without price;" without distinction, whether natural or spiritual, of class or rank or caste, birth or blood or pedigree. 'Come,' though you may have but an earthen pitcher to draw with; 'come,' though you can only lave up the water in the rough palm of your hands. Stoop and drink, and live!

Such, then, is the gracious offer of the Holy Spirit. After issuing an invitation so free, so all-comprehensive, He might well have been expected to leave the teeming multitudes—the rational responsible beings He addressed—either to close with it, or, if they madly preferred, in their unbelief to reject it. That divine Pleader

seems to pause for a moment, to see the effect His exhortation will produce. In response to words of such amazing mercy, can He expect aught else but one universal rush of thirsting humanity to this opened fountain of spiritual blessing. He looks abroad on the invited multitudes; but, strange to say, "like the deaf adder that stoppeth her ear," they seem as if they heard Him not. A few stragglers, a comparative handful of pilgrims, alone repair to the living streams; but the millions of earth continue in contemptuous indifference, bartering their eternal peace and happiness for what is only a mockery of their immortal longings.

Instead, however, of leaving the mistaken toilers to their own neglect, He ventures on expostulation. The beauty of this chapter is, that plea follows plea, invitation follows invitation; and in words of gracious love the tender remonstrance is addressed (ver. 2)—"Wherefore do ye spend money for that which is not bread? and your labour for that which satisfieth not?"

Then He proceeds to ply them with every possible argument, that they might turn and live. "Seek ye the Lord while He may be found" (ver. 6). "Let the wicked forsake his way, . . . the Lord will have mercy on him; . . . our God will pardon; . . . our God (as that literally means) will multiply pardons" (ver. 7); "I will make an everlasting covenant with you, even the sure mercies of David" (ver. 3). And if, in reply to all these gracious overtures, any one should say, 'No, it cannot be so, in *my* case; such mercy cannot be extended to *me*: it transcends the bounds of belief that God could stoop to pardon such sins as *mine*: the door of mercy, so open to others, must be shut against *me*: even man could not exercise such forgiveness and favour to his brother man; he would spurn him ignominiously away!' 'True,' says God; 'but I have a reply also to this; *I* am *not* man! Measure not *my* dealings by any human or any earthly standard. If you had man to deal with, all you say might be

true ; but “ my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, saith the Lord. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts ” (vers. 8, 9). And then He summons, as fresh auxiliaries in these gracious expostulations, varied evangelists of outer nature,—the rain and the snow from heaven, the seed and the harvest, the mountains and hills and trees of the field (vers. 10, 11, 12), that they may endorse and counter-sign the glorious promised blessings of grace and salvation. He tells, that as surely as the material world rejoices under the fructifying rains and dews ; as surely as the inserted seed of spring-time issues in a golden harvest, so surely would it be with the seed of the divine word, watered by the rains and dews of the Spirit of God. Blind unbelief may persist in scorning the message : but “ the mouth of the Lord hath spoken it ; ”—“ It *shall* prosper in the thing whereunto I sent it ” (ver. 11). That fierce

soul-travail is not to be in vain; the blood of the Great Surety has not been shed in vain. The living waters will eventually break through all human interposing barriers, and the waste-places of heathendom will be made to rejoice and blossom as the rose.

The chapter poetically closes with the description of a festal procession through these beautiful regions. Shall we call it a festal procession on their way to the true Palace and Temple of the Great King, spoken of in the chapter preceding—the Church triumphant in glory? (ver. 12)—“Ye shall go out with joy, and be led forth with peace.” The way along which the procession passes is through a renovated, regenerated, rejoicing creation. It is as if mountain and hill had been made vocal, and the trees of the field joined in the jubilant welcome; as if the choicest vegetation had taken the place of dwarf and offensive plants; as if the lofty cypress had supplanted the prickly thorn; as if the fragrant myrtle-tree

had come in place of the unsightly nettle. "And it shall be to the Lord for a name." This final and magnificent triumph of the Church of Christ shall be a perpetual and enduring memorial of divine power and love, a monument of praise to Jehovah's great name, an everlasting sign and sacrament that shall not be cut off.

Such, then, is this chapter, unrivalled in Scripture, whether in Old Testament or New, for its offers of free grace and mercy.

As a practical close, well may we take up the remonstrance of the divine Spirit—"Wherefore do ye spend money for that which is not bread? and your labour for that which satisfieth not?" (ver. 2.) 'O ye immortal beings'—as if He said—'suffering yourselves to be deluded to the imperilling and undoing of your eternities, why are you thus forfeiting the permanent and enduring for the fleeting and the perishable? You are robbing your souls of their deathless portion!

You are seeking satisfaction in what cannot satisfy; you are vainly endeavouring to cheat the spiritual appetite; you are "spending your strength on very vanity!" Confess it! Even when all outer things look bright and prosperous, are there not times (in the experience, it may be, of some whose eyes trace these pages), when you are the victims of fear and distrust, self-reproach and self-upbraiding, the prey of wearing anxieties and fretting vexations, which take the zest out of all your joys? At the very moment when the world may be envying you, thinking you favoured and happy, can you not tell a different tale? that the old quest and query of unsatisfied humanity rather is yours—"Who will show us any good?"—your self-constructed schemes of happiness blown upon and withered. Regarding the thoughts here spoken of, and which (as implied in the figure of the original) you have "*weaved*" for yourselves (*Wordsw.*),—the web is torn, the consuming moth has fretted the garment.

There is peevishness and restlessness and discontent. Your riches! they are precarious; the realised fortune may realise everything but happiness. The perch for your winged ambitions! it is cut from beneath your feet. You are truly here described as wasting your money,—immortal spendthrifts,—toiling for nought in the world's remorseless treadmill. Life is a mirage, an illusion, a poor phantom, "as a dream when one awaketh."

If you are content with such things,—with existence as an awful failure, then we can say nothing. You must be left to seek your poor happiness amid the shadowy and the unreal, and to utter the languishing cry of the abandoned prodigal, without his subsequent resolve, "I perish for hunger!" But if you are of a better mind;—if you are hungering after righteousness; if, in the simple language of the invitation, you feel yourselves 'thirsty,'—dissatisfied with the polluted streams, and longing for a nobler fountain; if this pleading Spirit has

awoke within you throbbings after a higher and diviner life ; if you have listened to the brief but sublime declaration, "Hear, and your soul shall live,"—oh ! delay not the acceptance of these overtures of grace ; come, forthwith, that with joy you may "draw water out of the wells of salvation." What are these waters which you are thus invited to draw, and drink, and live ? They are all the precious covenant blessings we have found contained in former chapters, beginning with pardon and peace here, and ending with glory, honour, and immortality hereafter ;—"The sure mercies of David." These waters are of every kind, and suited to the thirst and the longings of every soul. Cleansing waters, purifying waters, refreshing waters, healing waters, living waters, waters "springing up unto everlasting life." No money is needed to pay for them, Christ has paid all. No hard exaction and sacrifice is needed to procure them, Christ has procured all. 'Lord ! we come !' be it ours to reply. 'Blessed Spirit of

all grace ! we have heard Thy gracious invitation, Thy pleading remonstrances, Thy lavish overtures of love and pardon and mercy ! The importuning voice will be resisted no more ; eternal interests will be imperilled no more. The deserted fountain will be neglected no more. "As the hart panteth after the water-brooks, so panteth my soul after Thee, O God !"

"Jesu, Thou joy of loving hearts !
Thou Fount of Life ! Thou Light of men !
From the best bliss that earth imparts,
We turn unfilled to Thee again.

Thy truth unchanged hath ever stood ;
Thou savest those that on Thee call ;
To them that seek Thee Thou art good,
To them that find Thee—All in All !

We taste Thee, O Thou living Bread,
And long upon Thee still to feast ;
We drink of Thee the Fountain-head,
And, drinking, is our joy increased.

Our restless spirits yearn for Thee
Where'er our changeful lot is cast ;
Glad, when Thy gracious smile we see,
Blest, when our faith can hold Thee fast."

"IN THE MULTITUDE OF MY THOUGHTS WITHIN ME
THY COMFORTS DELIGHT MY SOUL."

"The righteous man perisheth, and no one considereth ;
And pious men are swept away, and no one understandeth
(Lowth),
That *the righteous is taken away from the presence of evil*
(Alexander).
He entereth into peace : he shall rest in his bed,
Whoever has walked straight before him (Delitzsch).

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But the wicked are like the troubled sea,
For rest it cannot,
And its waters cast out slime and mud.
There is no peace, saith my God, for the wicked."

—ISAIAH lvii. 1, 2, 20, 21.

XXIV.

**“Comfort ye, comfort ye, my people,
saith your God.”**

“The righteous is taken away from the evil to come. He shall enter into peace : they shall rest in their beds, each one walking in his uprightness.”

—ISAIAH lvii. 1, 2.

Early THE connection of the opening verses
Death. of this chapter with those of the last,
 though not direct, is in keeping with
the abrupt and parenthetical style common among
the prophets, and especially with Isaiah.

In the immediately-preceding context, he had been denouncing the avarice and profligacy of the faithless and degenerate Jewish rulers. Throne and altar had alike been desecrated. But amid these gloomy realities of the present, he is permitted to glance down the long future,

and his eye, at a distance of ninety years, settles on one beautiful exception to this widespread moral corruption in court and Temple. It is like a gleam of sunshine in a cloudy sky. Young King Josiah, who ascended the throne of Judah at the tender age of eight, is considered, by most reliable commentators, to be "the Righteous one" here specially referred to. In harmony with Isaiah's prophetic instinct and anticipation, the youthful monarch proved himself to be the most godly of his royal race. No nobler panegyric surely, could have been written than this—"Like unto him there was no king before him, that turned to the Lord with all his heart, and with all his soul, and with all his might, . . . neither after him arose there any like him" (2 Kings xxiii. 25). At the age of sixteen he was brought, by means of the perusal of a copy of the Divine Law, under the fervid power of personal piety; and from that day onwards, during a memorable decade, he became Priest and King in one. He commenced

as an iconoclast, sweeping away from mountain and grove and valley, every vestige and memorial of the idolatries sanctioned and encouraged by his apostate predecessors, and restored the purity of the Temple-worship,—“repairing the breaches of the House.” His acts of public devotion culminated, in what may well be considered the eventful day of his reign, when, at the age of eighteen, he summoned his people to a great convocation in Jerusalem. In more than its former pomp and impressiveness, the old feast of the Passover was kept, “all Israel,” as in former days, publicly renewing their covenant to their fathers’ God. The longing prayer of the hidden ‘seven thousand’ seemed to have obtained a gracious answer—“Wilt Thou not revive us again, that Thy people may rejoice in Thee” (Ps. lxxxv. 6).

But, strange, mysterious dispensation! just when in the flower of his youth, and when his people were prospering in peace and piety under his benignant sceptre, he is brought

wounded and bleeding from the battlefield at Hadadrimmon, whither he had gone to intercept the march of Pharaoh-nechoh, and he dies in his chariot ere he can reach his palace in Jerusalem. It attests the depth and intensity of the national grief, that a funeral dirge, composed by Jeremiah, was, for many years after, sung on the spot where he received the fatal wound; and the best choristers of Israel tendered annually their services in rendering the mournful strains. We get but a snatch of these in the plaintive ejaculation of the prophet who wrote them—"Ah, my brother! . . . ah, lord! or, ah, his glory!" (Jer. xxii. 18.) That it must, however, have been a scene and occasion of no common sorrow, is farther evidenced, when Zechariah uses it as a figure to describe the great future mourning and repentance of the Jews—"In that day shall there be a great mourning in Jerusalem, as the mourning of Hadadrimmon in the valley of Megiddon" (Zech. xii. 11). "The righteous," says Isaiah (as by prophetic

foresight he sees the sudden eclipse of this bright star)—“The righteous (suddenly) perisheth,” and “merciful men” (or as that word may be rendered—‘the *pious*,’ ‘men of godliness and kindness’—those who are ‘*good*,’ fearing God and loving man) “are taken away.”

Josiah's case is not singular. Who is there who cannot open the book of memory, and tell from their heart of hearts of the mystery of early death? Who has not young and cherished names written upon gravestones,—those whose “sun has gone down ere it was yet day?” Such early removals form a problem insoluble by our poor reason. They seem, at first sight, inconsistent alike with the divine wisdom and power and love. They look almost like the frustration of God's plans and purposes, a failure in His sovereign designs. It is the architect just completing His work, when that work comes with a crash to the ground. It is the sculptor putting the finishing strokes of his chisel on the virgin marble, when the toil of months or years

strews the floor of his studio. It is the gardener bringing forth from his conservatory the long-husbanded plants in their freshness and beauty, to bask in early summer sun, when a frost or hailstorm unexpectedly comes, and in one night they have perished! It is like the gourd of Jonah, encircling some earthbower of happiness; but the unseen worm blights it; and blights it, too, not when the noonday heat is over, or when the sun is westering, and when the shade could be dispensed with; but "in the morning,"—when most needed, and when, drenched with the night-dews, its growth was stimulated and its permanency seemed ensured. Yes! say as we like, strange and startling is the mystery of these early departures. We can understand the removal of the hoary-headed sinner, the man who has grown grey in iniquity; the world is well rid of such, for they lived only like the fabled upas-tree, to diffuse around them moral corruption and death. We can understand the removal of the aged Christian, the

veteran standard-bearer, who has fought his fight and finished his work, and gone to perpetuate lofty character and service in a better world—the Abrahams and Samuels and Davids who had “served their generation according to the will of God,” and who, “well-stricken in years,” “fell asleep, and were gathered to their fathers.” But the Josiahs of early and brilliant promise;—those who lived young lives of highest consecration, and diffused a hallowed influence in their age and sphere; those of whom, in the New Testament, Lazarus was the type,—the young light and life of that Bethany-home, the pride and prop of those loving sisters, and claiming, too, a Holier fellowship still. Where is the wisdom, where is the love, in stripping the Temple of its pillars ‘Beauty and Strength?’ “Ill can their fellows spare them!” None can wonder at the shock of corn cut down in its season, fully ripe. None can wonder at the hoary denizen of the forest being prostrated, after having weathered the blast of centuries.

But why has the green ear or tender sapling been rudely destroyed? Why is "the staff broken and the beautiful rod?" Above all (for such thoughts will, despite of better faith, force themselves on the crushed spirit), why has God—the Great and the Good and the Loving—nurtured affections in the human bosom only prematurely to blight and destroy them? Why has He created tender ties,—causing affection to entwine its fibres around the roots of the heart, and then, when these fibres are strongest, and affection deepest, why does He wrench the loved tendrils away? Why is the young soldier stricken down just when the armour of life has been assayed. Wherefore hath God apparently thus made His noblest work in vain?

The words of Isaiah give a twofold answer to these questions and mysteries. The one *negative*, the other *positive*.

I. "The righteous is *taken away from the evil to come.*" It was so in the case of Josiah. Utterly

mysterious at the time was that sudden summons—"Thus saith the Lord God, Remove the diadem, and take off the crown" (Ezek. xxi. 26): just, as we have noted, in the midst of his bright career, when he had inaugurated a new era of blessing among the thousands who owned his sway; a happy people rejoicing under the shadow of this young cedar of God. How strange, too, apparently, the recompense for all that pious zeal and youthful consecration, to be hurried away, in the twinkling of an eye, by the cruel shaft of an Egyptian bowman! Where was the Lord God of Elijah? and of the faithful and leal-hearted among His Israel, to permit this beautiful flower thus prematurely to droop and die in its summer prime? "Is the Lord's hand shortened, that it cannot save?"

Such might be the musing of-the pious and patriot band who bore their young King bleeding from the fray; such may possibly have been his own musings, as his life's-blood was

ebbing, and when his eyes were dimming among the distant mountains of Samaria.

But ah ! he and they were all in ignorance of the future. He and they had mercifully not revealed to them the impending invasion of the armies of Babylon, and the miseries which were to be entailed on his unhappy city and country ! Well was it that God compassionately spared him these sorrows of siege and torture and captivity, plunder of holy treasure and firing the cities of his kingdom, by *taking him away from the evil to come*. Had his people, at the hour of his death, known of all that was about to befall their land, it would have moderated that loud wail of sorrow which rose from the valley of Megiddon. It is to this Jeremiah refers in the 22d chapter of his Prophecies, when he thinks of Josiah peacefully sleeping with his fathers, in contrast with the wretchedness and humiliation which tracked the footsteps of his exiled successor. He addresses the nation of mourners, and thus would assuage their bitter grief—"Weep

ye not for the dead (your dead King Josiah), neither bemoan him: but weep sore for him (his unhappy son) that goeth away; for he shall return no more, nor see his native country" (ver. 10). God Himself, the Lord whom the young monarch served, does not disguise from him the reason of his early departure. For this is the special message sent to him direct from Jehovah by the mouth of Huldah the prophetess, as recorded in 2 Kings xxii. 18-20—"To the King of Judah, which sent you to inquire of the Lord, thus shall ye say to him. . . . Because thine heart was tender, and thou hast humbled thyself before the Lord, . . . I also have heard thee, saith the Lord. Behold I will gather thee unto thy fathers, and thou shalt be gathered *into thy grave in peace*; and thine eyes shall not see all *the evil* ('the evil to come') which I will bring upon this place."

What was true of Josiah's early death, is, we believe, applicable to all. Often, when we can

see no love or kindness or wisdom in these early graves, it is because the morrow to us is mercifully veiled. Who can tell, if the loved and early lost had been spared, what trials might have been in reserve for them?—ay more, what sins and temptations might have overtaken them? God, who foresees all, graciously saved a heritage of sorrow or sin, by an early removal. He “hastened their escape from the windy storm and tempest.” Better the brief loan, with all its hallowed, undarkened memories, than the prolonged life, with its possible evils. Better the lamb early taken from the fold, with its fleece unstained, than left footsore and fleece-torn, to pine on blighted herbage, and wander amid dry and deserted channels. Oh, how many a bitter tear-drop would be dried, and broken heart solaced and comforted, if, remembering all the perils of this world of sin and suffering, and with the bright retrospect of lives suddenly cut short, we would listen to the utterance of Isaiah like a sweet chime wafted from

the Temple of Heaven—"The righteous is taken away from *the evil to come!*"

But the words of the Prophet give also a *positive* explanation of the mystery of early death (ver. 2)—"He shall *enter into peace*: they shall rest in their beds, *each one walking in his uprightness*;" or rather, as it has been rendered, "each one walking straight before him;" or as Bishop Lowth translates it, "he that walketh in the straight path."

Josiah, the good, the pious, when he died, "entered into peace." It is a beautiful Old Testament evidence of the immediate blessedness of the departed righteous. His body rested in the tomb, as in a 'bed' or couch; his spirit—the spirit that walked so 'uprightly' on earth, with no divergence from the path of duty and piety—continues, in a loftier state of existence, this elevated 'walk.' The work cut short in this lower world is not arrested; it is only transferred. In a higher and loftier sphere

he still pursues these active ministries of righteousness.

There is an evident contrast between these opening words of the chapter and the terrible refrain with which it closes—"There is *no peace*, saith my God, to the wicked;" none in life, none in death, none in their limitless future. But, "the righteous," thus taken away, "enter into *peace*."

Another thought, too, is brought out in the original which we miss in our translation, and which suggests the same assurance of immediate bliss. It occurs in the words just quoted—"The righteous is *taken away*,"—"Merciful men are *taken away*;" this in the Hebrew is, "The righteous, the merciful, are *gathered*"—gathered to their fathers:* the same expression regarding Josiah which God Himself put, as we have seen, into the lips of Huldah—"I will *gather* thee to thy fathers:"—"Thou shalt be *gathered* to thy

* See Barnes and Alexander *in loc*.

grave in peace." It is not 'taken away,' as if some violent seizure, a wrench from friendship and happiness, and from all association with living souls. No! it is rather a joining of the great company, a being gathered to the gathering of the sainted dead. That early death of Josiah, and such as he, is the morning-chime which summons to the upper sanctuary, to unite in the worship of the great congregation. It is the vessel entering the haven of eternal rest; but that haven not in a silent deserted shore, but a harbour crowded with the loving and the glorified; a world not of loneliness, but rather of fellowship and communion with the great and the good and the true of all ages—

"The mourners throng the way, and from the steeple
The funeral-bell tolls slow;
But on the golden streets the holy people
Are passing to and fro;
And saying, as they meet, "Rejoice! another
To early bliss has come;"
The Saviour's heart is glad, a younger brother
Hath reached the Father's home!"

Reader, if the death of the young was annihi-

lation ; if the orb underwent eternal eclipse ; if there were even a period of intermediate suspension of consciousness and active energy ;—then such removal would be mysterious ; the blank would be a blank indeed. But the sun has not been blotted out from the firmament, it is lighting up other segments and sections of God's great world ; it has only sunk behind the line of our visible horizon. Ay more, whatever path of uprightness the departed one followed below, he is following that path above. Heaven is but an expansion and development of the characteristic traits of earth—"He that is righteous, let him be righteous still ; and he that is holy, let him be holy still." We can stand beside the death-bed of the young Believer, and as we are musing over that touching spectacle of baffled energy, paralysed activity, premature decay of physical and mental power, early removal alike from earth's duties and earth's joys ;—while on the one hand we can take hold of the negative solace, that by so soon

entering the haven he has been possibly spared many a "night and day on the deep," we can rise to nobler and better and brighter assurances. We can listen as to the whispering of angels hovering around his pillow—" *He shall enter into peace; . . . he shall walk in his uprightness.*"

One other thought on early death may be suggested by these words. The body rests in the 'bed' of the grave, and the spirit has entered into peace in heaven; but while that spirit is there pursuing its onward path of bliss and glory, it has not, in the truest sense, bid farewell to its earthly sphere. The lips are silenced, the music of the voice is hushed, the blank of the absent is too painfully realised. But "the righteous" survive dissolution even in this world; in their deathless memories of goodness and worth, they continue to "walk." The 'uprightness' is not laid by with their funeral shroud, or merely carved in the epitaph on their gravestones. No! it lives. The sun has vanished, but the glow still reddens the moun-

tain-tops, and glorifies the evening clouds. Josiah died. It was in one sense the last of him, when he was borne away on that bloody bier from the valley of Megiddo; or, at all events, when, as in great pomp, they laid him in the tombs of the Kings in Jerusalem. It is said that "all Judah and Jerusalem mourned for him." But, in the noblest meaning of the words, he lived on for generations afterwards. We read in 2 Chron. xxxv. 26, "Now the rest of the acts of Josiah, and his *goodness* (uprightness), . . . and his deeds, first and last, behold, they are written in the Book of the Kings of Israel and Judah." They were written in a more enduring volume. They were written deep on his own nation's heart. They *are* written in imperishable memorial in the chronicles of the great and good of all time. He shines, this day, as a clear fixed star in the olden firmament, and will thus shine on for ever!

This, then, is a farther comfort in the thought of early death. That "early" is a term only

relative to the body—that which rests in the bed of the grave; the spirit, the character, the *man*, still lives; and the old promise dictated by the sweet singer of Israel (apparently paradoxical), becomes literally true, regarding those prematurely taken away—“*With long life* will I satisfy him, and show him my salvation.” For what, after all, is long life? Is it measured and computed by formal arithmetic? counted by days, or weeks, or months, or years,—the threescore and ten, and perchance the fourscore years? No! the fourscore years of a misspent life is no life at all. It is a bankruptcy of being. It may be a life only sowing and perpetuating baneful influences; an untimely birth would be better. Whereas, that is the truest length of days, where, it may be for a brief but bright and consecrated season, some young life has shone gloriously for God, and which, though now a fallen meteor, has left a trail of light behind it, for which parent and brother and sister will for ever bless Him who gave the transient boon!

Ye who may, with sad heart, be often and again tempted to mourn those thus early removed—who read that promise of long life apparently broken and stilled, on the letters of an early tomb, and who think the Psalmist's other words more appropriate to trace on the marble, "He weakened my strength in the way: He shortened my days" (Ps. cii. 23), be comforted! God measures life by deeds, not by periods: not by beat of pulse or swings of pendulum: not by decades or jubilees, but by holy memories and lofty aspirations; with Him *character* is life, not years; *goodness* is life, not years. "The righteous," whether he has fallen at the very threshold of existence, or lived to a green old age—"The righteous shall be had in everlasting remembrance." The words of Isaiah have an emphatic truthfulness and meaning when read in this light—"The child shall die an hundred years old, but the sinner being an hundred years old shall be accursed" (Isa. lxv. 20). Which is the nobler lifetime? which is the

real length of days? Is it the sinner with his hundred years? these years a curse; or is it the child or youth with the influence of a brief but holy existence surviving the tomb? Cannot the latter appropriate, in its truest interpretation, the inspired utterance? in it, has not the early prayer obtained its divinest answer? and may not that prayer be now turned by mourning yet rejoicing hearts into the most enduring of epitaphs—“*He asked life of Thee, and Thou gavest it him, even length of days* FOR EVER AND EVER?” (Ps. xxi. 4.)

“What though the highest hopes he dearly cherished,
All faded gently as the setting sun;
What though our own fond expectations perished,
Ere yet life’s noblest labour seemed begun :

What though he standeth at no earthly altar;
Yet, in white raiment on the golden floor,
Where love is perfect, and no step can falter,
He serveth as a Priest for evermore !”

“IN THE MULTITUDE OF MY THOUGHTS WITHIN ME
THY COMFORTS DELIGHT MY SOUL.”

"But draw near hither.—

Behind the doors and the door-post hast thou placed thy
memorial (*Barnes*).

Thou hast visited the King with a present of oil,
And hast multiplied thy precious ointments,
And hast sent thine ambassadors to a great distance (*Delitzsch*),
And hast degraded thyself even unto Hades.
And of whom hast thou been so anxiously afraid, that thou
hast proved false? (*Lowth*)
And me, thou hast not remembered, nor called to mind?
Is it not because I was silent, and that for a long time,
And thou fearest me not?

In thy crying, let thy troops (of idols and allies) save thee.
But the wind shall carry them all away;
A breath shall take them off:
But he that trusteth in me shall inherit the land,
And shall take possession of my holy mountain (*Delitzsch*).

*For, thus saith the High and exalted One,
Inhabiting eternity, and whose name is the Holy One;
I dwell in the high and holy place,
And with the broken and humble of spirit,
To revive the spirit of humbled ones,
And to give life to the heart of the contrite (Lowth).*

There is no peace, saith my God, to the wicked."

—ISAIAH lvii. 3-21.

XXV.

**“Comfort ye, comfort ye my people,
saith your God.”**

“For thus saith the high and lofty One that inhabiteth eternity, whose name is Holy; I dwell in the high and holy place, with him also that is of a contrite and humble spirit, to revive the spirit of the humble, and to revive the heart of the contrite ones.”

—ISAIAH lvii. 15.

**A Royal
Edict.** IN the opening of the chapter, we found the Prophet (depressed and saddened by the gloom of the present) fetching a ray of comfort from a distant future.

He is now back again among the dismal realities of the age in which he lived. A King, very different from the righteous Josiah, swayed at this time the sceptre of Judah. It was the most mournful reign in the Hebrew annals. God, the God of Israel, whose name and glory

had been profaned, speaks from His throne of insulted righteousness. In the words of ver. 3, "Draw near," He cites before His tribunal the mass of the nation, who, along with their earthly monarch, had lapsed into apostasy: and in the midst of an address in which mercy mingles with judgment, He issues a royal edict or manifesto. It contains words of exalted comfort. In His character as Sovereign, He brings before us, and before His loyal subjects in every age, what we may regard as His two TITLES and His two PALACES. His *Titles*—"The High and Lofty One," . . . "whose name is Holy." His *Palaces*—"Who inhabiteth eternity," . . . "with him also that is of a contrite and humble spirit."

The first of His names or titles is "*The High and Lofty One*." The nation had lapsed into unblushing idolatry. They had made surrender of their traditional creed, and specially of its fundamental article—the personality and unity

of Jehovah; degrading it with the abominations of the Phœnician and Assyrian mythologies. In addition to altars to Baal, crowning the high places, statues of Astarte were erected amid the groves of Terebinth. This latter goddess seemed to have been adopted by Ahaz as his tutelary deity; an awful and debasing counterfeit truly of the Supreme: sitting on a lion, holding a thunderbolt and sceptre in either hand, and her head surrounded with the crescent moon. The Israelites, in olden time, had a sacred obligation laid upon them to bind about their persons, or inscribe as a perpetual memorial on the posts and lintels and gates of their dwellings, the declaration that "Jehovah is one Lord." This, however, in the times and by the example of Ahaz, they had wantonly thrust out of the way (ver. 8)—"Behind the doors also and the posts" (wherever concealment could be had) "hast thou 'cast' thy remembrance." They had virtually dethroned the Almighty, and delegated His power to inferior beings. No King before

or since, so defiled and desecrated the Holy Temple. In the front entrance he had set up chariots and horses of the sun, and on one of the roofs an altar for the adoration of the host of heaven: while the duplicate of a heathen shrine which he had seen at Damascus, was erected instead of the old altar of burnt-offering (2 Kings xxiii. 11). Nor was this all; the adoration of the living God was not only superseded by idols; but Ahaz had paid unworthy homage to the grasping world-power of that era. He had become the cringing and subservient tributary to Tiglath-Pileser, King of Assyria. He had the coward baseness to forget his fealty to a Greater, and to send ambassadors with the message—"I am thy servant and son:" following up this humiliation by despoiling his palace of its treasure, and God's Temple of its golden vessels, in order, by these, to propitiate the Asiatic ruler. It is this which is referred to in ver. 9, where Israel, in company with their King, are represented under

the figure of vassals, bearing the produce of their subjugated country to the heathen demigod ; in faithless forgetfulness of Him who had again and again made bare His holy arm in their behalf :—"Thou wentest to the king with ointment, and didst increase thy perfumes, and didst send thy messengers afar off, and didst debase thyself even unto hell." (Ver. 11) Jehovah asks, "Of whom hast thou been afraid or feared?" not of Me—but of some man that shall die. Thou hast only presumed on my silence and forbearance—"I held my peace even of old, and thou fearest me not" (ver. 11).

Isaiah himself, amid this awful deterioration, this wide-spread atheism, might well be apt to give way to despair. His faith at times could hardly fail to be clouded. But the God he served, calmed his fears and allayed his apprehensions by a special proclamation of His glory and goodness—"I am the alone High and Lofty One." "Their idols are silver and gold, the work of men's hand : they that make them are

like unto them. So is every one that trusteth in them. O Israel, trust thou in Jehovah; He is (still) your help and your shield." He makes the challenge in ver. 13: as if He said: Test the power of your idols—test the ability of your most potent human sovereigns in the day of need. "When thou criest, let thy companies" (or "heaps" of idols,—thy 'pantheons,' as a learned writer calls it (*Gezenius*)—let thy troops of idols and troops of men "deliver thee," if they can. They will only show their utter impotence. "The wind" (a breath of wind) "shall carry them all away." "The loftiness of man shall be bowed down, and the haughtiness of men shall be made low; and the Lord alone shall be exalted in that day." 'I shall be left on My glorious throne, alone, but Omnipotent, to vindicate my royal title and name—"Thus saith THE HIGH AND LOFTY ONE."'

But this Sovereign-Jehovah appropriates to Himself a second title—"Whose name is *Holy*."

The worst characteristic of these heathen deities was their *unholiness*. St Augustine tells us that he had witnessed in Carthage, with horror and dismay, the filthy and impure orgies of Astarte ; and these were fully equalled by the cruel and licentious rites of Moloch and Baal. How different from the nature and the worship of Israel's true God, this High and Lofty One ! Supreme in Omnipotence, He is also invested with the most exalted moral attributes : holiness, purity, righteousness. He is alone absolutely Good, as well as absolutely Powerful. Omnipotent and unchanging, His emblem is the Rock. But His true people can only exult in His power when combined with righteousness. Hence, when the Psalmist exclaims, " He is my *Rock*," he adds, " AND there is no *unrighteousness* in Him " (Ps. xcii. 15).

The Holiness of God, indeed, is a study more for angels than for men. In this impure world, and with these impure hearts of ours, we cannot soar to the right comprehension or understand-

ing of this lofty attribute. In common, however, with the other moral perfections of deity, we see it gloriously reflected in the Person and character of Him who is "the image of the Invisible God," and who was pre-eminently "the Holy One." Nor was it in the pure, sinless nature of Jesus, that the divine holiness had its only, or its most illustrious manifestation. More conspicuously still was that holiness attested and displayed in the sufferings and death of the Great Surety. The superscription was written on the cross of Calvary, as it could be written in no other way—"Thou lovest righteousness and hatest wickedness." How awful that holiness which demanded so terrible a satisfaction, ere the demands of the law could be satisfied, and the sinner be saved! At that moment, when the sun hid his face, and the rocks were rent, and the earth trembled; we may suppose the bright myriads above were stooping from their thrones and "crying one to another"—"Let us praise His

great and terrible name, *for* it is HOLY" (Ps. xcix. 3).

While God's holiness was thus solemnly displayed in the mightiest transaction of all time; we have therein also a proof and pledge that all His subordinate transactions with His Church and people will be characterised by the same unspotted, inviolable righteousness. There are times, such as those in which Isaiah lived, when impurity and wild license run riot, and when the question is asked by misgiving spirits, Can a holy Being tolerate such evil? why can the Great and the Good and the True permit such monster iniquity and crime to stalk forth unchallenged in His own earth? Here we touch, doubtless, one of the insoluble problems;—the existence of moral evil in the government of an Almighty and Gracious Ruler. All we can do, is to own what we cannot comprehend; to bow and adore. This we know, that "the Lord is righteous in all His ways, and holy in all His works;" and if the world seems full of apparent

contradictions,—if there be startling anomalies in His moral administration, it is for us to wait patiently the full development of the divine plans and purposes. The day is coming, when from every corner of His creation, and from every tongue of His ingathered Church, the ascription will ascend—"Righteous art Thou, O Lord!" "Although thou sayest thou canst not see Him; yet judgment (righteousness, holiness) is before Him; therefore trust thou in Him."

We pass now from God's two royal Names and Titles to His two royal Dwellings—the two Palaces of the Lofty One and the Holy One.

The *first* is the Palace of ETERNITY ;—"that inhabiteth *eternity*." In nothing do we feel how puny we are, as when we attempt to scan the marvels and glories of this divine dwelling-place, with its illimitable corridors of space and time. When we endeavour to climb our way up the giddy eminences of the past, making eras and

epochs perches in the ascending flight, where thought may fold its weary wing, and pause and breathe, and pause and breathe again ;—and yet the pinnacles and altitudes rising in majestic proportions, the higher our flight and the loftier our soarings ; all earthly arithmetic fails, and we can only join the patriarch in his confession, “Canst thou by searching find out God ?” We feel the poverty and meagreness of human conception in endeavouring to grasp things which are too high for us, and that we are only darkening a sublime theme by human words. In speaking of the Almighty’s dwelling-place, it becomes us rather to follow the example of him who was caught up to behold it, and who on his return was dumb ; for he had seen what “was not lawful (or possible) for a man to utter.” O God ! we are lost amid the splendours of Thy uncreated divinity. We can, in some measure, understand heaven as Thy throne, and the earth as Thy footstool :—but we cannot grasp Thy life-time, for it is ETERNITY. The words were

a mockery in the case of these Oriental sovereigns to whom Ahaz did homage; but they form a true and appropriate ascription as applied to this only really Great Being—"O King! live for ever!"

We come now to the *second* Palace of the High and Lofty One. What a transition, from the halls and corridors of Eternity, *to the human bosom!* "Wonder, O Heavens! and be astonished O Earth!" Here is the omnipotent Jehovah—He who is seated on the pinnacles of universal empire, and whom the heaven of heavens cannot contain, stooping to fellowship and association with the children of the dust! The Greatest of all is the Kindest of all. The mysterious Inhabiter of eternity and the Dweller in the contrite heart, is one. "Behold" (we may well exclaim, using the exclamation of devout amazement),—"Behold the tabernacle of God is with men, and He will dwell with them, and they shall be His people; and God Himself shall be with them, and be their God; and

God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes."

There is a twofold description here given of this humbler tabernacle where Jehovah dwells—a twofold characteristic of the human Heart.

1st. It is *Contrite*. He speaks of "the contrite ones"—those whose souls are melted and broken for sin,—who feel the bitterness of their estrangement from God, and who long for restoration to His favour. "The crushed" as the words have been rendered (*Delitzsch*). They remind us of the utterance of one such penitent in the hour of his deep contrition:—"The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit: a broken and a contrite heart, O God, thou wilt not despise" (Psalm li. 17). This condescending Lord is farther said, in the words before us, "to revive the spirit" of such. It is the Hebrew phrase for consolation and encouragement. His gracious influences are elsewhere spoken of, as like "rain upon the mown grass." On those laid low by the sharp, cutting scythe of conviction

—lo! the rain descends, the fragrance of the crushed and prostrate heart rises like sweet incense. God fulfils His own gracious promise in the words immediately following (ver. 18) “I will restore comforts to him and to his mourners.”

After Contrition, or as the sequel and complement of it, comes *Humility*. This is the second epithet in the twofold description. God dwells with the humble. He “resisteth the proud.” The proud man is God’s antagonist. But “He giveth grace to the lowly.” Men love to sound their trumpet before them. Existence, with many, is an ambitious scramble to clutch the bubble reputation;—to fight their way to worldly and social position,—to be accounted great, and wise, and influential. The godly and the saintly method is the reverse : to avoid parade and show ; to love goodness more than greatness ; solicitous rather about having “the ornament of a meek and quiet spirit,” which the apostle says “is in the sight of God of great

price." *Contrition*, the former of these states of mind, our Blessed Lord knew nothing of; for He had no sin, which is the condition of penitence. But as we have already spoken of Him, in His adorable Person, as the expression and embodiment of the divine *Holiness*, so also may He well be regarded as the perfect pattern of *Humility*. He, the Lord of all, became the Servant of all. The distinguishing characteristic of His life, we have had thus beautifully unfolded in an earlier chapter—"He shall not strive nor cry, neither shall He lift up His voice on the streets." Not only could he say, "Be ye holy for I am holy," but "Be ye humble for I am humble:" "I am meek and lowly in heart." And in these two attributes of His sinless nature—purity of soul and humility of life—He stands forth a peerless example for all His people. What a glorious "revival," in the true sense of the word, when these will come to form the characteristics of His believing Church. In one of His own memorable sayings, He

thus combines them, "Except ye be converted (turned from sin to holiness), and become as little children (in humility), ye cannot enter into the kingdom of God" (Matt. xviii. 3).

Nor is this promise of the High and Lofty One to make the humble and the contrite heart His dwelling-place, of any mere limited or local signification. It embraces all mankind: (ver. 14) —"Cast ye up, cast ye up, prepare the way, take up the stumbling-block out of the way of my people;" and again (ver. 19)—"Peace, peace to him that is far off," as well as "to him that is near." This whole portion, indeed, of Isaiah's prophecy, from chapter xl. to lxvi., may be regarded as the brief manifesto of our text in an expanded form. The first portion of it, from chapter xl. to end of chapter xlviii., is a free offer of grace and salvation to the Jew. But after Israel is addressed, the invitation is widened. It is made independent of country, and clime, and pedigree, and national distinction. Accordingly, chapter xlix. (the second part) begins with an

overture to the Gentiles, couched in the significant words and figure, "Listen, O *Isles*, unto me; and hearken, ye people *from far*."

A closing word of solemn warning follows all these promises of mercy and encouragement to the lowly and penitent (ver. 21)—"*There is no peace, saith my God, to the wicked.*" It is the repetition of the same words (now addressed to the Gentiles) which we found at the close of chapter xlviii., summing up the divine exhortation to the Jews; only with the verbal substitution of the Gentile name "My God," for the Hebrew "Jehovah." The Prophet emphatically seals both missives with the same solemn denunciations against the impenitent and unbelieving; strengthening, however, the present one, with an additional graphic and impressive description of the agitation and turbulence of the wicked, (ver. 20)—"They are like the troubled sea when it cannot rest." The Hebrew is even stronger than in our translation, "which is unable to be still" (*Barnes*). What a contrast with the calm

of God's "Holy mountain" referred to in ver. 13, high above all sublunary storms and tempests! Oh! may we know, each of us individually, now and evermore, the truth of the words, "Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace (*lit.* in peace, peace) whose mind is stayed on Thee."

O Thou, whose Palace is on high,
By myriad angel-hosts adored :
Who cease not day nor night to cry,
"All holy, holy, is the Lord!"

A lowlier, humbler home than this,
Is dignified as Thine abode :
The heart for sin that broken is
Becomes Thy dwelling-place, O God!

Let no base things athwart its halls,
Their dark, polluted shadow throw ;
Let joy and love adorn its walls,
And peace surmount its portico !

Thy myrtles grow not on the heights,
The lily seeks the valley-shade,
The lark in lowliest furrow lights,
The fullest corn-ear droops its head.

Let such a lowly heart be mine ;
Such incense from life's altar rise ;
Conquer my pride, O grace Divine !
Its demon-spirit exorcise.

The High and Lofty One awaits
To enter in ;—Prepare the way !
Undo the bolts—lift up the gates—
Welcome the Heavenly Guest to-day !

“IN THE MULTITUDE OF MY THOUGHTS WITHIN ME
THY COMFORTS DELIGHT MY SOUL.”

*"Arise, be light! for thy light is come,
 And the glory of JEHOVAH is risen upon thee.
 For is! darkness covereth the earth,
 And deep gloom the nations:
 But upon thee shall JEHOVAH arise,
 And upon thee shall His glory be conspicuous (Lowth).*

.
 The wealth of the nations shall come unto thee;
 A swarm of camels shall cover thee,
 Young camels of Midian and Ephah (*Alexander*):
 All they from Sheba shall come:
 Gold and frankincense shall they bring;
 And the praise of JEHOVAH shall they joyfully proclaim
 (*Wiersé*).

All the flocks of Kedar gather together unto thee,
 Unto thee shall the rams of Nebaioth minister:
 They shall ascend with good-will my altar,
And my House of beauty I will beautify (Lowth).
 Who are these that fly hither as a cloud,
 And like doves to their windows?
 Surely the islands are waiting,
 And the ships of Tarshish come first.

.
 The glory of Lebanon to thee shall come,
 Cypresses, plane-trees, and sherbin all together (*Delitzsch*),
 To adorn the place of my sanctuary;
And the place where I rest my feet will I make glorious."

—ISAIAH LX. 1-13.

XXVI.

“Comfort ye, comfort ye, my people,
saith your God.”

“Arise, shine ; for thy light is come, and the glory of the Lord is risen upon thee. For, behold, the darkness shall cover the earth, and gross darkness the people : but the Lord shall arise upon thee, and His glory shall be seen upon thee. . . . I will glorify the house of my glory. . . . I will make the place of my feet glorious.”

—ISAIAH lx. i 2, 7, 13.

The Glory of THIS magnificent chapter is one of the Millennial Church. many which stand out conspicuous in Holy Writ for grandeur of imagery and elevation of sentiment. It contains an unrivalled picture of the glory of the Kingdom of Christ ; or, as it has happily been called by a commentator, “the golden age of the Messiah” (*Barnes*). Although, doubtless, in the first instance, it is the literal Jerusalem, with its towers and palaces and festal crowd of wor-

shippers, which passed before the eye of the Prophet, this was only emblematic of the true city of God, the spiritual Zion, built on the Rock of Ages, and against which the gates of hell shall never prevail; a city, small indeed in its beginnings, but here represented, in vision, as growing and expanding in majestic proportions, until a whole tribute-world is seen hastening within its walls, and laying offerings at the feet of its Anointed King!

There is a double figure or metaphor (a peculiarity with Isaiah) which runs through the chapter. The first of these, and the preponderating one, is that to which we have just alluded, of a City: the other, that of a Queen, who had been uncrowned and dethroned, sitting (as previously described) in the dust, with fetters at her side, and the tear in her eye. *Vitringa*, that excellent expositor, imagines that a prophetic chorus is represented, in the opening verse, as addressing a summons to this Matron City. May we venture to expand the thought?

May we not farther picture that chorus-group as standing on the top of the Mount of Olives, looking away, on the one hand, towards the weird summits of the mountains of Moab, flushed with the first indications of day-dawn; on the other, across the Jehoshaphat Valley and Kedron, on Jerusalem itself, still enveloped in the darkness of night? The sun has now risen above the horizon, tipping the hills of Bashan and Gilead with his first beams. Soon, summit after summit of the nearer ranges of Ephraim and Judah—the Jericho and Bethel hills—are lighted up with his radiance. At last “the city of the Great King,” till now shrouded in darkness, takes on its mantle of brightness; tower and Temple are transmuted into gold; and then, when the whole is bathed in a flood of glory, like a royal diadem in the hand of its God, these gazers on the mountain-summit burst forth in jubilant song—“*Arise! shine, for thy light is come!*” In a previous chapter, a call from the same, or from a similar chorus, had been

addressed to the Queenly capital—"Awake! awake! put on thy strength, O Zion! put on thy beautiful garments, O Jerusalem!" From her couch of darkness and mourning, sorrow and despair, "smitten down by the divine judgment," the royal slumberer awakes, clad in shining attire, and having the glory of the Lord as a coronal on her brow. What a contrast between the representative of earth's proudest cities, spoken of in a former portion of this prophecy, and this spiritual metropolis! To Babylon, the cry is, "Come down and sit *in the dust.*" To Zion, "Arise!" (from the dust), "Arise and shine!" God's visible 'Glory' or *Shekinah* was for centuries confined to the Jewish Temple; but this apostrophe announces that, no longer localised or limited, it is now to irradiate all ages and all climes. In that beautiful Messiah-Psalm (lxxii.), whose language so identifies it with this chapter, we have these emphatic closing words—the divine climax—telling where the Divine 'Presence' was hence-

forth to rest—"And let the whole earth be filled with His *Shekinah*, or His GLORY."

The 2d verse is descriptive of the state of the world before Christ's first coming, and descriptive of the state, also, in which the world shall be, preparatory to the 'millennial era,—
"For, behold, darkness shall cover the earth, and gross darkness" (or, as that has been paraphrased, "a night of clouds"—*Delitzsch*) "the nations." But—

"The beam that shines on Zion hill
Shall lighten every land."

God's glory, as manifested in His Church, will be like a beacon-light to the surrounding heathen tribes:—Ver. 3, "The Gentiles shall come" (or "nations," as it has been rendered, "walk") "to Thy light, and kings to the shining of Thy rays." The Church of Christ will be so resplendent with the spiritual glories of her King, that the very monarchs of the earth will love to go and cast their crowns and sceptres at His feet. The world will become one vast

spiritual Temple, and shall be called "an House of Prayer for all nations."

Whether it be from the lips of the Prophet himself, or from the supposed chorus of voices, there is a new summons in ver. 4. It is again addressed to the Queenly Matron-City, now risen from her couch of sorrow and sadness. She is exhorted to look from her battlements in all directions, round about to the remotest horizon, and witness the unparalleled spectacle of mankind—every representative of the human family—crowding up to the courts of Zion to do homage to Zion's God. "Lift up thine eyes" (these eyes that have just been dim with weeping) "round about, and see; all they gather themselves together; they come to thee." At the spectacle of her returning children, her "sons and daughters" (ver. 5), she is represented in a conflict of maternal emotion, trembling with joy;—as Luther renders it, "Then wilt thou see thy desire, and break out into shouting."

There is a rapid transition to a new figure in

the same verse. The world is in a state of midnight darkness and tempest, roaring with tumultuous waves, 'like a mighty sea of Galilee.' Its nations are driven hither and thither, with the angry gusts of error and unbelief, passion and profligacy, war and discord, "wasting and destruction." But Christ, as of old, walks the stormy waters, and with His Omnipotent voice and spirit rules the raging of the sea; when the waves thereof arise, He stilleth them. "The abundance of the sea," as it is here expressed, "shall be converted unto Thee;" or (as will be found on the margin of the Bible), "The noise of the sea shall be turned," turned into a calm. He has said, "Peace, be still." The multitudinous waves lie obedient at His feet. It becomes peaceful as a quiet lake reflecting the image of heaven.*

A farther and more minute description follows, of this gathering of "the peoples." *Wealth, Com-*

* See entire note of Bishop Wordsworth, p. 173.

merce, and *Agriculture* are three great interests and powers on earth,—a trinity of forces, which have in all ages engrossed mankind. Each one of the three will have its representatives in that vast multitude who are to ask the way to Zion with their faces thitherward.

(1.) *Wealth* shall come. (Ver. 5), “The forces (or rather, the wealth) of the Gentiles shall come unto Thee:” whether individual wealth, or the spoil and treasure of warrior-nations; these latter, with sheathed sword and reversed spear, singing other peans, and bringing other trophies, than those of battle.

(2.) Next are seen (ver. 6) the *Commercial* crowd, the traders of the world, the merchant-princes and their sons. See them beautifully described under the Oriental picture of caravans of camels and dromedaries laden with spices, “gold and frankincense and myrrh,” crowding from Sheba, to lay their costliest offerings of devotion and homage (like Sheba’s queen of old), at the feet of “the true Solomon, the

Peaceable, the Beloved of the Lord." They had often before brought presents to the great world-powers, all of which have crumbled to decay, and passed, as a dream when one awaketh. Now their song, as they go up to the House of the Lord, is this—"HE shall live, and to HIM shall be given of the gold of Sheba" (Ps. lxxii. 15).

(3.) The looms and mines of East and West having contributed their richest fabrics and treasures, these are followed by another crowd in verse 7th—the *Agricultural* representatives—the owners and tillers of the soil—the nomadic tribes. Shepherds driving "the flocks of Kedar" and "the rams of Nebaioth"—names identified with wild, roving Ishmael. These "go up," each with their appropriate offering. Ay, farther, to add to the power of the picture, their "flocks," and "rams," are beautifully represented hastening to offer themselves as willing sacrifices, to "minister" to the chief Shepherd. They go, not with reluctance, but in spontaneous

self-devotion—"They shall come up with acceptance (or 'with good-will') on mine altar."

No wonder, when Israel's God, or rather when Israel's and the world's Messiah, sees the vast festal train from every clime ascending the Hill of Zion, that He adds, "I will glorify the house of my glory" (or, "I will beautify my beauteous house"). The Temples and Pantheons of the heathen gods were wont to be beautified and adorned with the spoils of vanquished nations; God's temple is to be adorned with living trophies—living souls from the nations of the saved!

But there is again a change of speaker. The divine voice ceases, and the Prophet (or the chorus) in this antiphonal chapter, takes up the theme. The eye of the spectator or spectators is turned, from the companies crowding up by land, to the voyagers on the Great Sea. Ships are seen afar off, with swelling canvas,—fleets of them, fleeing before the wind. Owing to the

great distance, and the speed of their sailing, they seem to assume phantom forms. They are mistaken for fleecy clouds, or for flocks of doves on wing to their cotes (*Vitringa*) (ver. 8)—“Who are these that fly as a cloud, and as doves to their windows?” The question is addressed to Messiah, and (in ver. 9) Messiah answers, ‘These strange, cloudy, winged shapes are *vessels*—“the ships of Tarshish,” bringing the sons of the Far West from isles and distant continents, with their offerings of silver and gold, to do homage to the name of the Lord their God, and to the Holy One of Israel.’ May we, in this distant isle, not have been specially included, when the darkness of Paganism was still brooding over us? “For me,” says Christ, “the islands are waiting”—(ver. 9). St Jerome, who lived long before Britain had emerged from obscurity, suggests that the expression, “The ships of Tarshish *first*,” means foremost in rank. If so, has it not been from our own favoured ports that many a vessel has

borne the missionary to the sphere of his labours—to the shores of India and the islands of the Pacific? Is it too much to arrogate to ourselves the honour and privilege, of being conspicuous as the senders of these ships of Tarshish, leaders of the fleet sailing to Zion, and bringing Zion's children home? Oh! most glorious of all services and ministries this,—that of rousing the nations, so to speak, from their perches of error, and sending them, as doves on the wing, to the shelter of the true Ark. How beautifully is this described in that great missionary Psalm, where the flight of the heavenly, golden-plumaged dove, immediately follows Jehovah's Great Embassy—"The Lord gave the word; great was the company of those that published it. . . . Though ye have lien among the pots, yet shall ye be as the wings of a dove covered with silver, and her feathers with yellow gold" (Ps. lxxviii. 11, 13).

And, as if all that had been said were not enough to describe the glory that was in store

for the Church of the future, the Divine Speaker proceeds to tell of the part which these converted nations of heathendom will have in the rebuilding of Zion's walls, and the beautifying of her sanctuaries. So great and increasing shall be the crowd of her festal worshippers and glorified citizens, that (ver. 11) her gates shall be open "day and night continually," to admit the rushing stream.

Having exhausted the emblems of her greatness and excellency as derived from the living throng, the speaker turns to other objects, still further to symbolise this approaching glory of the City of God. In the words of one of the best interpreters of this chapter, "From the thought that everything great in the world of man is to be made to serve the Holy One and His Church, the Prophet passes to what is great in the world of nature (*Delitzsch*, vol. ii., p. 417). (Ver. 13) —He makes selection of the noblest and rarest trees, and represents them as contributing their

combined beauties for the adornment of the gardens, and the decoration of the walls of Zion. He begins with the glory of Lebanon's forests. Lebanon, lying beyond the borders of the Holy Land, was the emblem of the Gentile world. Her lordly patriarchal cedars were to unite their strength to the gracefulness of lowlier trees and shrubs indigenous to Palestine—"the cypress, plane, and sherbin tree together." Gentile was to combine with Jew in "beautifying the place of His sanctuary." These representatives from the vegetable kingdom, varying vastly in bulk and appearance, in leaf and bark, in fruit and soil, were, in this respect, strikingly emblematic of the varying characters and temperaments, ages and professions, duties and avocations, gifts and graces, to be found in the Christian Church; but all having their appropriate and assigned place in the beautifying of the sanctuary. The cedar has its place in the gates and rafters; the plane, in pillar and flooring; the box and pomegranate, in the

carved work of the ceilings; the fragrant shittim-wood, in the Sacred Ark; the cypress and sherbin, in the outer groves and gardens. By beautiful combination (unity in diversity) "fitly framed together," they grow up "an holy temple in the Lord!" The cedar says not to the fir, "I have no need of thee;" nor the pine to the box, "I have no need of thee;" but each feels honoured that it occupies some lowly position in God's plans and purposes. It is not of one, but of all, harmoniously combined in this blessed unity of service and consecration, that the Great Master-builder here says, "And I will make the place of my feet glorious."

May the Lord hasten that promised day, when incense and a pure offering shall everywhere ascend, from the rising to the setting sun! May it be ours—each in our varied spheres, and by individual Christian effort—to do what in us lies to share the honour, as "God's pioneers," of preparing a pathway for

the wheels of Messiah's chariot. May we feel that for each is assigned some peculiar and appropriate work in the upbuilding of the Great Spiritual Temple—the beautifying of His glorious House. Come! Thou Holy Prince of Peace! take to Thyself thy great power, and reign! “Arise and shine,” Thou Sun of Righteousness, with healing in Thy beams! In the glory of Thy millennial brightness, may a new and grander fulfilment, than in any former ages, be given to the words—“The people that walked in darkness have seen a great light: they that dwell in the land of the shadow of death, upon them hath the light shined” (Isa. ix. 2.)

Hasten, Lord, that morn of glory
When the world shall groan no more,
When the gospel's joyous story
Shall be spread from shore to shore.

Speed the glorious proclamation,
Let Messiah's power increase;
Every tribe, and tongue, and nation,
Welcome in the Prince of Peace!

Wake your echoes, rocks of Kedar !
Midian ! Ephah ! own His grace !
“ Fir, and pine, and box, and cedar,
Beautify His holy place.”

Blessed time, when every dwelling
Shall the joyful anthem raise ;
Every heart with rapture swelling,
Thrilling every tongue with praise !

When the leopard and the lion
With the lamb in peace shall lie,
And within the earthly Zion
Dwell the love that reigns on high !

Firmament, now glowing o'er us !
Mountains, rivers, isles, and sea !
All combine to swell the chorus
That will ring earth's jubilee !

“ IN THE MULTITUDE OF MY THOUGHTS WITHIN ME
THY COMFORTS DELIGHT MY SOUL.”

"Violence is no more seen in thy land,
 Desolation and ruin in thy borders (*Alexander*):
 And thou callest Salvation thy walls,
 And Praise thy gates.
*No more shall be to thee the sun for a light by day;
 Neither for brightness will the moon shine unto thee:*
 JEHOVAH shall be to thee an everlasting light,
 And thy God shall be thy glory.
*Thy sun shall set no more;
 Nor shall thy moon wane (Lowth):*
*For JEHOVAH shall be to thee for an eternal light,
 And the days of thy mourning shall be ended.*
 And thy people shall be all righteous:
 For ever shall they inherit the land,
 The shoot of my planting, the work of my hands, that I may
 be glorified.

.
 I JEHOVAH in due time will hasten it."

ISAIAH lx. 18-22.

XXVII.

**“Comfort ye, comfort ye my people,
saith your God.”**

“The sun shall be no more thy light by day ; neither for brightness shall the moon give light unto thee : but the Lord shall be unto thee an everlasting light, and thy God thy glory. Thy sun shall no more go down ; neither shall thy moon withdraw itself : for the Lord shall be thine everlasting light, and the days of thy mourning shall be ended.”

—ISAIAH lx. 19, 20.

The Glory of IN the previous chapter, under the Church sublime and varying forms of Triumphant. imagery, we had unfolded to us the glories of millennial times, when Christ, enthroned as Head of His Church and as King of nations, will receive tribute offerings of devotion and love from every quarter and from every representative of the habitable globe,—the Sun of Righteousness dispersing the gross darkness

of the nations, and flooding the whole earth with His radiance,—that which was once “for-saken” and “hated,” made “an eternal excellency, a joy of many generations” (ver. 15). The whole description of this perfected earthly Zion—the millennial glory of the Church militant, is summed up in the closing words of ver. 18—“Thou shalt call thy walls Salvation, and thy gates Praise.” At the gates of the old-world cities, watchmen—trusty sentinels—were stationed to apprise of the enemy’s approach. Here they will be needed no more. The clang of arms is silenced, the din of battle has died away. The walls that formerly bore martial names, will then be called ‘*Salvation* ;’ the gates that formerly resounded with the savage war-cry, or shook under the blare of martial trumpet or the roll of martial drum, will now witness nought but bands of holy citizens singing praises to their ‘Saviour-King !’

But as is common with the prophets,—indeed, as was a characteristic of our blessed Lord’s

own discourses (see Matt. xxiv.), so is it here. The lower theme of the Church glorified on earth, rises into the higher theme of the Church glorified in heaven. The prophecy of the Seer of Judah merges into the sublime visions of the Seer of Patmos; and from glorious things spoken of the City of God, in its militant state, he proceeds to the more glorious realities of the New Jerusalem above. In these last verses of the chapter, we seem to be reading the last verses of the Apocalypse, and to be gazing on some of St John's greatest visions.

The central thought and theme of these two magnificent verses (19, 20) is, that Jehovah Himself, in His manifested presence, is to form the surpassing glory of the heavenly world. The noblest examples of light we have, in this our earth, are those material orbs which illumine the firmament,—the meridian sun by day, the moon, with her silver lamp, by night. But these are at best feeble emblems of that "Light of lights" who is to flood eternity with His radi-

ance. The sun, moon, and celestial bodies are often taken in Scripture as figures of ordinances and means of grace,—those manifold instrumental agencies which the Lord has appointed in His Church, to be His own remembrancers. In heaven, these lesser and borrowed lights will be required no more; they are superseded. They have no glory, by reason of the glory which excelleth, God being then “All in all.” What the material sun is to this world, He is to the kingdom of His redeemed. There is no briefer, there is no more beautiful description of heaven than is here given in two words, “*Thy God! thy Glory!*” The rendering of them in the Jewish Targum is remarkable:—not, “The sun shall be no more thy light,” but, “Thou wilt not *need* the shining of the sun:”—*i.e.*, there may be other joys in that region of bliss;—other orbs lighting its firmament, other minor sources of happiness: (who can doubt, for example, that there will be the recognition of departed friends, eternal fellowship with ‘the

loved and lost,' now the loved and restored; the "communion of saints" such as has only been a poor unrealised dream of our creeds on earth, but which will be a grand verity there?) But so overpowering will be the glory of God,—so pre-eminent and peerless the bliss of His manifested presence, that, in the words of these old Jewish translators, "thou wilt not *need* the shining of the sun." The love of human kindred,—pure, lofty, ennobling as it is, will be continued: but it will not be really required; it will not be indispensable to brim the cup of your gladness. God Himself, in a sense to which no psalm or psalmist on earth ever rose, will be your "exceeding joy" (Ps. xliii. 3). You will not need the shadow when you have the substance; you will not need the stream and the rill when you have the Infinite fountain—"The Lord shall be unto thee an everlasting light, and thy God thy glory!" As the majestic words are repeated, with little variation (doubtless to emphasise and impress them), a wail seems to be

wafted up the vista of ages, from the ten thousand sickbeds and broken hearts of a long future! It ascends not in vain. As the last touch, so to speak, put by the divine pencil on these sublime delineations of coming bliss and glory, that wail is thus answered (ver. 20)—“And the days of thy mourning shall be ended!” It is the anticipated voice and vision of a future Revelation—“And there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away” (Rev. xxi. 4).

Two brief closing entries follow this glowing description. They come like postscripts to the Heavenly missive. The one is the *character* of the citizens, alike in the earthly and the heavenly Zion. The other is the great *end* for which the city itself was built and peopled.

(1.) The character of the inhabitants of Zion; (ver. 21)—“Thy people also shall be all *righteous*” “The pure in heart,” now and ever,

alone can "see God." "Blessed are they that *do* His commandments, that they may have right to the tree of life, and may enter in through the gates into the city" (Rev. xxii. 14).

(2.) The grand and ultimate purpose for which every gate, and tower, and battlement of that city was planned and upreared, and for which these troops of festal worshippers were permitted to enter in, is this, "*That I may be glorified*" (ver. 21). God's glory, as it was the first cause, so is it the final end of creation; "*for of Him, and through Him, and to Him are all things*" (Rom. xi. 36).

As St Paul terminates his epistles with his mark or signature, after the amanuensis he employed had laid down his pen, so it is with the Divine Heavenly Speaker in this chapter (ver. 22) — "I the Lord will hasten it in his time." Hasten what? Hasten all that He had spoken of, from the opening verse of the passage onwards; from the first hour of grace, to the final entrance into glory; from the time when the summons

was first heard by the Soul in its spiritual darkness, "Arise, shine!" till the moment when it is lost in the blaze of brightness before the throne. He seems to take us to a Pisgah Mount, and as He points to the Canaan of everlasting rest, whispers in our ears the words of one of the closing utterances of this chapter—"They *shall* inherit the land for ever, the branch of my planting, the work of my hands, that I may be glorified!" The city is now at a distance. It is with us, as with Christian and Faithful in the "Pilgrim's Progress,"—we hear only the sound of its distant bells. But like the olden Hebrew bands, as they went up to the earthly Zion to hold their seasons of high festival, we can anticipate the joyous hour, and say, "Our feet shall stand within thy gates, O Jerusalem!"—

" Where the faded flower shall freshen,
Freshen, never more to fade,
Where the shaded sky shall brighten,
Brighten, never more to shade ;

Where the sun-blaze never scorches ;
Where the star-beams cease to chill ;
Where no tempest stirs the echoes
Of the wood, or wave, or hill ;
Where the morn shall wake in gladness,
And the moon the joy prolong ;
Where the daylight dies in fragrance
'Mid the burst of holy song.
Brother, we shall meet and rest
'Mid the holy and the blest.

Where the hidden wound is healed ;
Where the blighted light reblooms ;
Where the smitten heart the freshness
Of its buoyant youth resumes ;
Where the love that here we lavish
On the withering leaves of time.
Shall have fadeless flowers to fix on,
In an ever spring-bright clime ;
Where a King, in kingly glory,
Such as earth has never known,
Shall assume the righteous sceptre,
Claim and wear the heavenly crown.
Brother, we shall meet and rest,
'Mid the holy and the blest."

"IN THE MULTITUDE OF MY THOUGHTS WITHIN ME
THY COMFORTS DELIGHT MY SOUL."

"The Spirit of the Lord JEHOVAH is upon me;
 Because JEHOVAH hath anointed me
To bring good news to the humble:
He hath sent me to bind up broken-hearted ones,
To proclaim to the captives freedom,
And emancipation to the fettered;
To proclaim the year of grace from JEHOVAH (Delitzsch),
And the day of vengeance of our God;
To comfort all that mourn;
To put upon Zion's mourners (gladness),
To give them a beautiful crown instead of ashes (Lowth),
The oil of joy instead of mourning,
A garment of praise instead of a faint spirit;
 And they shall be called Terebinths of righteousness,
 The plantation of JEHOVAH, for His glory.

Joyfully I rejoice in JEHOVAH,
 My soul shall exult in my God;
 For He hath given me garments of salvation to put on,
 He hath wrapped me in a mantle of righteousness,
 As the bridegroom decketh himself with a priestly crown
 (Alexander),
 And as the bride arrays herself with her bridal ornaments.
 For as the earth puts forth its tender shoots,
 And as the garden causes the things sown in it to germinate;
 So the Lord JEHOVAH will cause righteousness to sprout,
 And renown before all nations."

ISAIAH lxi. 1-3, 10, 11

XXVIII.

“Comfort ye, comfort ye my people,
saith your God.”

“The Lord hath anointed me to preach good tidings unto the meek : He hath sent me to bind up the broken-hearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to them that are bound ; To proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord, and the day of vengeance of our God ; to comfort all that mourn ; To appoint unto them that mourn in Zion, to give unto them beauty for ashes, the oil of joy for mourning, the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness.”

—ISAIAH lxi. 1-3.

Messiah's THAT these are the words, not of an
Manifesto. evangelist, but of the great Lord of
whom Isaiah specially spake, we
have the most conclusive of all testimonies.
The introductory utterance of the Divine Speaker
is this—“The Spirit of the Lord God is upon
me.” As kings and prophets of old were officially
consecrated by having anointing-oil poured

on their heads, so was Messiah publicly set apart for His mediatorial work, when, emerging from His baptism in Jordan, this Holy Spirit spoken of here, was poured upon Him without measure. The descent of the Divine agent was symbolised by the form of a dove, accompanied with the attesting voice, "This is my Beloved Son." Immediately after, we find Jesus inaugurating His public ministry in the synagogue of Nazareth (Luke iv. 17). He does so, by taking these very words as the text of His opening sermon, and appropriating their reference to Himself. For, having read them from the Jewish Scriptures, it is added, "He closed the Book" (or wound up the roll) with the comment, "This day is this scripture fulfilled in your ears."

The first public speech or utterance of a great man on earth is regarded with peculiar interest. It is the key of subsequent utterances. What sublime interest must attach to the opening sermon—the initial manifesto—of the Prince of

Prophets, the Lord of glory, of whom it was declared, "Never man spake like this Man!" He who is the true Teacher of His Church and people, is here brought successively before us, under the varied names and representations of *Evangelist, Healer, Liberator, Messenger of Jubilee, and Comforter of the Mourner*. Let us consider these in their order; and in doing so, may that same Spirit of the Lord be upon us, and enable us to listen to the gracious words which proceeded out of His mouth.*

This entire chapter follows, in beautiful sequence and contrast, the preceding one. That, we found, contained an impressive representation of the Church militant and triumphant "in the summit of its glory" (*Delitzsch*), like a mighty temple covering the whole earth, and whose songs are yet to fill the everlasting ages. Here we are conducted, so to speak, into the

* The well-known engraving in the frontispiece of this volume, is a grand embodiment, in visible form, of the great truths of this whole prophetic utterance.

porch or vestibule of this Temple, and behold it adorned with five varied Pictures, each signally illustrative of the work of Him who "loved the Church, and gave Himself for it, that He might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word; that He might present it to Himself a glorious Church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing; but that it should be holy, and without blemish" (Eph. v. 25-28).

The first picture which arrests our attention, is that of a divine Evangelist or Teacher, with a group of learners at His feet, docile and of child-like spirit, looking up with the eye and stretching out the hand of faith,—with minds prepared, as the furrows of early spring, for the reception of the immortal seed. That Holy Spirit has anointed Jesus, in the first instance, "to preach good tidings unto *the Meek*." We are forcibly reminded of the parallel commencement in the great Beatitude sermon, when He opened His mouth and taught the expectant listeners, saying,

—not, Blessed are the self-righteous, or the wise, or the prudent in this world,—but, “Blessed are the *poor in spirit*.” The first element of the new nature is the realised consciousness of utter beggary and creature-destitution, the want of real righteousness and life, the acknowledgment that all is to be received as the gift of free and unmerited grace, the breathing of a deep heart-and-soul persuasion—“Lord, save me, (else) I perish!”—“The hungry He hath filled with good things; and the rich He hath sent empty away.” Remember Him who, on another occasion, set a child in the midst, and pointed to the recipient ‘infant-spirit,’ with its surrender of self and self-will, as that which best qualifies for entering the new Kingdom.

The next picture, in that supposed vestibule, is a crowd of “*Broken-hearted*,” with the tear in their eye, crying out, in the agony of conviction, “What must we do to be saved?” Other mourners there are, from a different reason, who

are immediately described. But He groups, in the first instance, those who are suffering from the fruitful cause of all sorrow, "the inner ground of all evil"—*sin*. They are filled with a broken-hearted sense of their demerit, their alienation and estrangement from the true Life and Life-giver, the present-felt misery of such alienation, and having the looming shadows of a dark and unprovided-for eternity hanging over them. Jesus is represented as coming to such, in the character and mien of a wise, gracious, gentle, and tender Physician; saying, regarding every diversity of spiritual disease and sickness, "*Jehovah Rophi*, I am the Lord that healeth thee" (Exod. xv. 26): "He healeth the broken in heart, and bindeth up their wounds" (Ps. cxlvii. 3). Let none tremble as they weep such tears of contrition,—writing with them bitter things against themselves. These are the very tears which God is said, in an expressive Eastern figure, to "put into His bottle." Hear the inspired words which describe

the noblest altar, and costliest sacrifices, and sweetest incense, which human hands and hearts can uprear and present—"The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit : a broken and a contrite heart, O God, Thou wilt not despise" (Ps. li. 17).

The next picture is that of a Prison. Through its iron bars you can discern a band of forlorn *Captives*, bound with fetters, pining in apparently hopeless servitude, sighing for the free air and the bright light of heaven. It is the worst of all captivity, for it is the same spiritual bondage that had just been delineated ; moral and spiritual chains are galling them, and the wailing cry rises from lips wan with despair, 'Oh, wretched that we are ! who shall deliver us ?' Nor is it the original bondage of the curse and condemnation which alone oppresses : each has his own special fetter to deplore :—the iron chain of some fierce temptation ; the golden fetter of some guilty pleasure, but though

golden, a fetter still; debasing lusts, fiery passions, unholy thoughts, unworthy fears, and specially that fear of death which, with many, makes them all their lifetime subject to bondage. Jesus is represented as a Divine Warder approaching the dungeon, with the keys of deliverance at His side, making, in the first instance, a general proclamation of "liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to them that are bound;" but, in addition, giving help and strength and comfort to each individual soul,—conveying a message to each "prisoner of hope," in all time of their tribulation,—saying, "I will make my grace sufficient for thee: I will perfect strength in weakness." Thus, as His spiritual freemen—alike ransomed by His blood and protected by His grace and power—He sends them forth from their cells and their fetters, "compassed about with Songs of Deliverance."

The next picture is specially a Hebrew sub-

ject. In one compartment, we see a crowd of Jewish bondslaves ; some represented with their ears bored, in token of prolonged degradation : in another, is a group of debtors cowering under the glance of exacting creditors : in another, those of noble blood and pedigree, but who, by misfortune or crime, have forfeited their hereditary possessions. It is a new succession of emblems expressive of spiritual degradation, insolvency, and forfeiture. The scene and time of the picture is laid in the era of *Jubilee*, that well-known season of emancipation and joy which occurred every fiftieth year in Israel. The true Proclaimer of that glad festival—the Messiah-Deliverer—approaches ; and, with better than sound of silver trumpet, He proclaims “the acceptable year of the Lord” (or a year of grace), and “the day of vengeance of our God !” There is a glorious manumission for all in spiritual servitude ; the dungeons of condemnation are thrown open, the debts of a guilty past are remitted, the forfeited possession

of God's favour is restored—"Blessed is the people that know the joyful sound" (Ps. lxxxix. 15).

But yet there is also an impressive warning conveyed in that picture and proclamation. The day of Jubilee only came once in a generation. To the Israelite, its blessings and immunities were restricted to the one year alone. In a truer and far more solemn sense is this the case with every sinner. "The acceptable year of the Lord" or "the day of Grace" is not in perpetuity; the blessing, ours to-day, may be gone to-morrow; the fetter that may be unbound to-day may be riveted to-morrow; the debt that may be remitted to-day may be beyond the power of cancel and liquidation to-morrow; the blast of the silver trumpets which may be heard to-day may be silent to-morrow. Once "the day of (merciful) visitation" is ended, and the Great Creditor can grant no farther discharge; then comes "the day of vengeance of our God." "Now is the

accepted time (the 'acceptable year'), behold now is the day of salvation !”

Once more, as a concluding picture, we have a representation of a crowd of *Mourners*. A similar group formed the subject of a previous delineation. But it was then, mourners by reason of the one parent, fruitful, gigantic cause of all sorrow and suffering,—mourners on account of sin. This last is a picture of a vaster crowd, suffering from all the diversified ills which flesh is heir to ;—those pining in poverty, those racked with pain and sickness, those wounded with cruel disappointment, worldly loss, heartless treachery, selfish unkindness, faithless friendship, unmerited wrong ; above all, those sorrowing from bereavement, those who are lamenting their dead, the Rachels “weeping for their children,” the Ezeiels telling of the desire of their eyes “taken away by a stroke,” the aged Jacobs saying, “Joseph is not and Simeon is not, will ye take away

Benjamin also?" Impressive is this oriental description of these bereaved. They are pictured as seated, like the old patriarch, in beds of ashes, with dust sprinkled on their heads, and with torn and dishevelled garments. In times of mirth and gladness, when their circles were unbroken, it was very different with them. They had then their heads and faces glistening with the oil of joy. They had (as the word in the verse means), a tiara or turban round their brows, beautiful garments on their persons, and sandals on their feet. Yes, and these festal days are to be once more their own. That Anointed Messiah—He who was "anointed with the oil of gladness above His fellows" (Ps. xlv. 7)—has a glorious errand to every mourner. Who so qualified as He for its discharge? combining, as He does, the might of Deity with the sympathies of humanity,—thus able to understand and discriminate all the varied cases of suffering among His people, and to enter with tender sensitiveness, as

"the Brother-Man," into every pang that rends their heart.

What is His proclaimed mission? He is to give them "beauty" (or rather, 'a bridal diadem or coronal') instead of "ashes;" "the oil of joy" instead of their "mourning." A portion of that oil, poured by the Holy Spirit on His own head, is to descend to the skirts of His garment, and those "poor afflicted ones" who are lying lowest at His feet (touching the hem), will catch the most. He is to give "a garment of praise" (songs of praise for the divine goodness, as if glowing like a spangled robe) for those who, in "a spirit of heaviness," have been sitting in the dust, and refusing to be comforted. And this, moreover, He is "to *appoint* unto them"—a word which means "*to set*, as a permanent thing that could not be revoked" (*Wordsw.*) The world's balms and balsams, its sedatives and solaces, have nothing permanent in them. The wound closed to-day may bleed afresh to-morrow. Of the Great Physician alone can it be said, "who

forgiveth all thine iniquities, who healeth all thy diseases"—"For ever, O Lord, Thy word is *settled* in heaven." This Eternal Son of the Highest is the only true Barnabas, pre-eminently "*THE Son of Consolation.*" He alone had the right to utter His own beatitude, "Blessed are they that mourn : for they shall be comforted."

And now, in surveying this picture-gallery,—this vestibule at the Beautiful Gate of the Temple, hung with these varying delineations, what is the great truth brought home to us in all its blessed power and reality? It is that which should never weary us by its simplicity or iteration,—that Christ is a great, and gracious, and all-sufficient Saviour; that there is not the heart-wound He cannot "bind up" and cure; that there is not the sin-stricken soul that can raise unsuccoured the cry, "Is there no balm in Gilead? is there no Physician there?" (Jer. viii. 22). We have here every emblem of sin and of human misery and sorrow combined, and

over each picture we can read the gleaming letters, "And He healed them all" (Matt. iv. 24). As one says, who knew well both the wound and the cure, "A wonderful advertisement this of the Great Physician."* Go the round of aching humanity, and where is the case that is beyond His remedial power? Is it the despairing sinner haunted by the remembrance of a dreadful past?—He is anointed to proclaim, "I came not to call the righteous but sinners to repentance" (Mark ii. 17). Is it the prodigal, away in the cheerless desert, feeding on husks and garbage?—He is there to tell of a Father's love, and home, and welcome, and to whisper in his ear the encouraging assurance, "Thy sins, which are many, are forgiven" (Luke xv. 18; vii. 47). Is it the down-trodden and oppressed? the weary and the burdened, bearing the yoke of human oppression and bondage?—"Come unto me, all ye that labour and are

* *Lady Powerscourt's Letters.*

heavy laden, and I will give you rest" (Matt. xi. 28). Is it those distracted with care and anxiety, climbing all their life-long the Hill Difficulty; or buffeting the waves of adversity, with no seeming pause in the storm, no break in the sky, existence a troubled sea which cannot rest?—"These things have I spoken unto you, that in me ye might have peace. In the world ye shall have tribulation: but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world" (John xvi. 33). Is it the lonely, and destitute, and forlorn—"the poor also, and him that hath no helper?" "He that loveth me shall be loved of my Father, and I will love him, and will manifest myself to him" (John xiv. 21). Is it the little child, fearful as it lisps its evening prayer?—"Suffer the little children to come unto me, and forbid them not" (Mark x. 14). Is it those mourning the treachery of trusted but faithless friends?—"And there is a Friend that sticketh closer than a brother:"—"Lo! I am with you alway, even unto the end of the

world" (Prov. xviii. 24; Matt. xxviii. 20). Is it the sufferer on the couch of languishing, every nerve a chord of anguish, sighing alternately for evening shade and morning dawn, and wondering at the mystery of such discipline?—"As many as I love I rebuke and chasten" (Rev. iii. 19). Is it the widow with her fatherless ones?—"I will not leave you orphans, I will come to you."—"Leave thy fatherless children, I will preserve them alive, and let thy widows trust in me" (John xiv. 18; Jer. xlix. 11). Is it the fear of death, the dread of the last enemy?—"Fear not, . . . I am He that liveth, and was dead; and, behold, I am alive for evermore; and have the keys of the grave and of death" (Rev. i. 18). Truly the leaves of this Tree are for the healing of the nations. This divine Shelter (if we may use a simile already employed with reference to another emblem) is like the giant oaks of Bashan or the mighty cedars of Lebanon. While the king of the forest can repose under the majesty of their

shadow, or the eagle make a perch of their strong boughs;—the coneys, ‘a feeble folk,’ may take refuge in the hollow of their trunks, and the tiniest and most timid bird may fold its wings in peace under the protecting branches.

Have we personally appropriated all the blessings of this great Salvation? The opening verses of the chapter are His; are the closing ones ours? Can we say, in glad response to this gracious unfolding of His ability and willingness, His grace and power, (ver. 10)—“I will greatly rejoice in the Lord. My soul shall be joyful in my God, for He hath clothed me with the garments of salvation, He hath covered me with the robe of righteousness?”

He comes ! in meek and lowly human form,
Unheralded by dazzling pomp and noise,
Not in the “fire, the earthquake, or the storm,”
But with the accents of “the still small voice.”

He comes ! to preach the gospel to the poor,
Franchise the slave, and break the tyrant’s chain,
To wrench the bars from off the dungeon door,
And set the pining captive free again.

He comes ! the Messenger to broken hearts,
Affliction of its poignant sting disarms,
"To him that hath no helper" help imparts,
The little child smiles fearless in His arms.

He comes ! to give the groping blind their sight,
To wipe the tear from off the mourner's eye,
To cheer the orphan's darkened home with light,
And soothe the widow in her agony.

He comes ! to rescue from the guilt of sin,
And from its tyrant power to grant release ;
To hush the rage of demon storms within,
And leave His own best legacy of "Peace."

He comes ! to stop the roll of conquering drum,
Unyoke the steeds from Battle's iron car,
To strike the fevered lips of cannon dumb,
And hang in silent halls the trump of war.

He comes ! O earth, give welcome to His voice !
He comes ! thy tribes to pay Him homage rise !
He comes ! to make thy arid wastes-rejoice,
And blossom like a second Paradise.

**"IN THE MULTITUDE OF MY THOUGHTS WITHIN ME
THY COMFORTS DELIGHT MY SOUL."**

"For Zion's sake I will not keep silence,
And for Jerusalem's sake I will not rest,
Till her righteousness break forth like morning brightness,
And her salvation like a blazing torch (*Lowth* and *Delitzsch*).

.
*And thou shalt be called by a new name,
Which the mouth of JEHOVAH shall determine.
And thou shalt be a beautiful crown in the hand of JEHOVAH,
And a diadem of royalty in the palm of thy God (Alexander).
No more shall it be called to thee, Azubah (Forsaken one) (Ib.);
Neither to thy land shall it be said, Shemamah (Desolate):
But thou shalt be called Hephzi-bah (My delight is in her),
And thy land Beulah (The wedded matron) (Lowth):
For JEHOVAH shall delight in thee,
And thy land is married.
For as a young man marrieth a maiden,
So shall thy sons (or Restorer) (Lowth) marry thee:
And with the joy of the bridegroom in his bride,
So shall thy God rejoice in thee.
Upon thy walls, O Jerusalem, have I set watchmen,
And all the day and all the night long shall they not keep
silence (Alexander):
Ye that remind JEHOVAH (the Lord's remembrancers)
(margin), keep not silence;
And give no rest to Him, till He establish,
And till He set Jerusalem a praise in the earth.*

ISAIAH lxii. 1-7.

XXIX.

“Comfort ye, comfort ye my people,
saith your God.”

“And thou shalt be called by a new name, which the mouth of the Lord shall name. Thou shalt also be a crown of glory in the hand of the Lord, and a royal diadem in the hand of thy God. Thou shalt no more be termed Forsaken; neither shall thy land any more be termed Desolate: but thou shalt be called Hephzi-bah, and thy land Beulah: for the Lord delighteth in thee, and thy land shall be married. For as a young man marieth a virgin, so shall thy sons marry thee: and as the bridegroom rejoiceth over the bride, so shall thy God rejoice over thee.”

. —ISAIAH lxii. 2-5.

The New Name, and the Threefold Blessing. THE Bells of COMFORT seem to ring with quickening peal, as the prophecy is approaching its close. This chapter, indeed, forms in itself, a unique repository of consolation; it continues the colloquial structure of the one which precedes it. There, we found the Messiah-King, in the opening verses, issuing a *manifesto*,

in which He unfolds alike His own character, and the nature and design of His mediatorial offices and Kingdom. At the close, the Church responds, in a song of joy, to Him who had clothed her with "the garments of salvation" and covered her "with a robe of righteousness." At the commencement of the present chapter, God Himself, the Great Jehovah of His people, answers their ascription of praise with a renewed promise of blessing: that for Zion's sake He will not be silent, and for Jerusalem's sake He will not rest, "until the righteousness thereof go forth as brightness" (or like the ruddy hues of a brilliant morning), "and the salvation thereof as a lamp that burneth" (ver. 1).

The picture brought before us, is a repetition of that with which we are now familiar in many preceding portions of the prophecy, and specially in chapter lx. Zion is in ruins; the Queenly Matron is uncrowned, sitting, a mourning, forlorn widow, shrouded in darkness. Her twin name is "Forsaken" and "Desolate" (ver. 4). But

suddenly the darkness vanishes ; and not only is the silent, deserted city flooded with light, but, by a new and rapid change of figure, it becomes a stronghold with sentinels on its towers, sounding their watch-cries or watch-songs. God Himself is represented, in a beautiful apostrophe, as turning and addressing Zion thus—" I have set watchmen upon thy walls, O Jerusalem, which shall never hold their peace day nor night." The Prophet next interposes, as he hears this gracious announcement, and thus calls upon the watchmen as they pace the battlements—" Ye that make mention of the Lord " (or, *margin*—" Ye that are the Lord's remembrancers "), " keep not silence ; and give Him no rest, till He establish, and till He make Jerusalem a praise in the earth." Jehovah again speaks in reply, in verse 8. Because He could swear by no greater, He swears by Himself. He makes a solemn asseveration " by His right hand, by the arm of His strength," that every word He had spoken would be fulfilled,—that

the day was coming in a better and brighter future, when the Church, undeterred by the dread of pillage and plunder, would reap her own harvest and garner her own corn, and drink, as of old, the vintage-cup of thanks within the courts of His holiness (ver. 9). Then, following out the dramatic form in which the chapter is cast, we may suppose a new chorus of voices heard, calling upon the gates to be flung open, the obstructing stones to be gathered out, the highways to be repaired for the return of the ransomed (vers. 10-12)—“Go through, go through the gates ; prepare ye the way of the people ; cast up, cast up the highway ; gather out the stones ; lift up a standard for the people. Behold, the Lord hath proclaimed to the end of the world, Say ye to the Daughter of Zion, Behold, thy salvation cometh :” while, by universal acclaim, the once despised people are called “Holy, the redeemed of the Lord ;” and the once despised city, “Sought out, a city not forsaken.”

Stripping it of all figure, we have here a new pledge and guarantee, given by Jehovah, that He will fulfil His work of grace to His Church on earth, till grace is merged in the glory of the Church millennial, and, finally, of the Church triumphant.

Let us proceed to consider the verses more specially selected for meditation, from this miniature gospel of comfort. They bring before us the privileges of the believer under a three-fold form :—

Kingly honour ; Inviolable security ; Tender love.

I. God promises to His people KINGLY or ROYAL HONOUR—"Thou shalt also be *a crown of glory*, and *a royal diadem*." Believers are "kings" as well as "priests unto God." The Church is spoken of alike as the Queen Consort and as the King's daughter (Ps. xlv.) The conquering Christian is at last to be throned

and crowned. He is to sit with Christ upon His throne, even as He also overcame, and is set down with His Father on His throne (Rev. iii. 21). He is to "receive a crown of glory that fadeth not away" (1 Pet. v. 4). Isaiah's expression, "crown of glory," means rather a "*tiara*,"—a circlet studded with precious stones of varying beauty and lustre; while the "royal diadem" is literally "a diadem of a kingdom."* Those skilled in the niceties of Hebrew rendering tell us, indeed, that in either case very much the same idea is conveyed. Not one solid crown, but rather a chaplet sparkling with diamond, pearl, and gem, of varied size and form and colour; or, as some suggest, like a garland of flowers. And while the emblem unfolds the *dignity* of the believer—associated thus with kingly honours, it presents us also with a beautiful picture of the varying gifts and graces which are found in the Church of Christ.

* Barnes.

Some are designed and fitted for active, some for passive work. Some have the grace of speech and word ; others "the grace of faith and deed." Some are called, like these sentinel watchmen, to guard the walls and utter the watchcry ; others to shape the stones and prepare the mortar ; or even humbler Temple-work still, as hewers of wood and drawers of water. Some are called to glorify God by bold effort and prowess—the Elijahs and Pauls and Luthers, "sons of thunder ;" others, by the manifested patience and submission of suffering and sick-bed,—sitting, like Mary of old, at the feet of her Lord, in the mute, expressive silence of faith and love and un murmuring acquiescence. Yes ! there is nothing more beautiful than this 'diversity in unity' in the gemmed crown which here symbolises the Church of Christ. "An army with banners," of varying device. A garden with flowers of varying size and hue and fragrance ; or these combined in a wreath of harmonious colouring. A multitudinous sea,

every wave of slightly varying form, and slightly varying chime. Diversified sheep-folds, some on the heights, some in the valleys; some made of stone, some of intertwisted branches and palisade, but forming the one flock of the one Chief Shepherd. The only question with each church and each individual believer should be, What place do I seek humbly to occupy in this tiara of kingly beauty? In what humble way am I seeking to glorify Christ? Let me, above all things, do nothing to blemish or tarnish the lustre of that crown, or soil the beauty of that kingly garland; and, remembering that each has some work to do and some place to fill; that no wave in that sea of glory can be silent, from the booming billow in mid-ocean to the tiny wavelet murmuring on the pebbly beach, let me seek to do something, however lowly, for the glorifying of my God, and for promoting the extension of His name and cause in the world. No gift is too lowly to contribute to the embellishment of that kingly diadem. "Unto

every one of us is given grace according to the measure of the gift of Christ" (Eph. iv. 7).

II. The second privilege God here promises to His Church is INVIOABLE SECURITY. (Ver. 3)—That crown is "in *the hand* of the Lord;" that royal diadem is "in *the hand* of our God." Some writers have unnecessarily perplexed themselves in explaining this figure. They imagine there may be some reference to the twofold crown worn by the *athletes* in ancient Greece,—the Olympic crown which was worn on the head, and the Pythian crown which was borne in the hand. But we need no such classic or far-fetched interpretation.* "The hand of God," the "arm of God," as we have seen in a previous exposition, is the symbol of strength. To be "in His hand," therefore, is the emblematic pledge and assurance of His protection. The figure is still more forcible and emphatic in the

* See *Alexander in loc.*

original. It is "in the *palm* of His hand" (*Henderson*)—that which is, alike, the tenderest, safest, and securest part. We found Jehovah, in another place, thus speaking, as the Guardian of this same Zion—"Behold, I have engraven thee on the palms of my hands." Both utterances are in beautiful accord with the subsequent declaration of the Great Shepherd-King Himself, speaking of the people He has redeemed with His blood—"They shall never perish, neither shall any pluck them out of my hand" (John x. 28). Out of that hand of power, manifold are the adversaries that would try to wrench the Church. But He who is said to take up the waters "in the hollow of His hand," in a truer sense holds, in that palm, His covenant-people. Though an host should encamp against them their heart need not fear. As if to make more emphatic the assurance, He repeats the figure of powerful protection—"a crown of glory *in the hand* of the Lord," "a royal diadem *in the hand* of our God;" so that

it may be said, in the words of the Psalmist, "God hath spoken once; yea, twice have I heard this, that *power* belongeth unto God" (Ps. lxii. 11). Moreover, as we have already noted at the outset, this divine protection is further strengthened and guaranteed by other two assertions made in the succeeding context. The one, where Jehovah represents Himself as securing the safety of His Church by manning its walls with faithful watchmen, keeping vigil night and day. The other, in which, by a still more solemn and expressive emblem, He swears by that very Hand which holds the coronal (His "right hand," His most powerful arm,—what He calls "the arm of His strength"), that He will never relax His hold, or alter His purposes of faithfulness; so that His people may have "strong consolation." "All His saints," said Moses, "are in Thy hand." "Thou savest," said the Psalmist, "by Thy right hand, them that trust in Thee." "The right hand of the Lord is exalted, the

right hand of the Lord doeth valiantly." Well may we make it our prayer, in the extremity of our own or of the Church's weakness—"Awake, awake, O *arm* of the Lord!" Is "the Lord's *hand* shortened that it cannot save?" What is His answer?—"I am the Lord thy God, that divided the sea, whose waves roared: the Lord of Hosts is His name. . . . And I have covered thee *in the shadow of mine hand*, that I may plant the heavens, and lay the foundations of the earth, and say unto Zion, Thou art my people" (Isa. li. 15, 16).

III. But a third promise God makes to His Church, is that of TENDER LOVE OR FAVOUR. In the figure which is so often employed both in Old and New Testament, the Church is here further represented as the Bride of Christ. Once her name was that of the mother of Jehoshaphat—Azubâh (*i.e.*, "Forsaken"), or Shemâmâh (*i.e.*, Desolate). But, as was the case with Abraham and Jacob, and other illustrious saints, at some

great crisis-hour of their history, when their names were changed, so with the Church of the Redeemed. "The *Forsaken* one" and "the *Desolate* one" is henceforth to be called by the name of the Queen to whom Hezekiah was married on his recovery from sore sickness and impending death—"Hephzi-bah" (2 Kings xxi. 1), *i.e.*, "She in whom He delights:"—a beautiful emblem of that spiritual and regal bride to whom the Heavenly King and Bridegroom (the true Hezekiah) was united after His death, and resurrection to endless life. The land, too, which is represented as desert, and its name 'Desolate,' is to be called *Beulah*, *i.e.*, "Possessed," or "Married." "For," it is added (ver 5)—"As a young man marrieth a virgin, so shall thy sons," (or perhaps, rather, "thy Restorer"—*Lowth*), "marry thee; and as the Bridegroom rejoiceth over the Bride, so shall thy God rejoice over thee." It is the strongest of emblems that can be employed, to denote the depth and tenderness of Jehovah's love to His

people. "Husbands," says the Apostle, "love your wives, *even as Christ also loved the Church.*" "Glorious things," it is said in Psalm lxxxvii., "are spoken of thee" (or, as a recent commentator has rendered the words, "With glorious promises He claimeth thee *for His Bride*"), "O City of God" (Ps. lxxxvii. 3).^{*} We have just seen, when God would reveal by emblem to His people their royal honours and exalted privileges, He speaks of the Church as a "crown" and "a royal diadem." When He would farther reveal His relation to them

- as their powerful Guardian and Defender, He speaks of that crown as held in the palm of His hand. But when He would reveal the tenderer relation of endearing affection, He puts the coronal on the brow of His affianced Bride, and says, "I will betroth thee unto me for ever."

Most blessed threefold emblem! That gemmed garland in the hand of Jehovah (rather

^{*} See Thrupp on the Psalms *in loc.*

in the hand of Him who is the Church's Bridegroom and King), is a true *immortelle*—an amaranthine wreath left by angels on His tomb, but which He carried with Him, on the day of His accession to His throne, to hold in pledge until the bridal hour, when the Queen—the Church triumphant and glorified—will stand at His right hand “in gold of Ophir” (Ps. xlv. 9). Or, adhering more faithfully to the idea conveyed in the words, that royal Garland is now being weaved. It is not His crown of deity—the eternal crown He wore from everlasting ages, as “God over all.” That cannot be added to. It is complete in itself: no gem in it is wanting: it is a crown of pure gold, the same to-day as it was before the trance of eternity was broken by any manifestation of His power. But this regal diadem, consisting of the immortal souls He has redeemed, has ever fresh gems to increase its lustre. This regal garland, plucked from His garden on earth, is every day, every year, including fresh flowers,—some in bud, some in

blossom. He is holding it now, so to speak, in His hand, while it needs protection ; but the day is coming, when no breath can soil its precious stones, and no blight injure its floral beauty ; that day which will usher in the coronation of the Church triumphant—the “ great day ” of His espousals, “ the day of the gladness of His heart.”

May God hasten it! All prophecy and inspired teaching tell us, it will be at earth’s deepest midnight that the cry will be heard, “ Behold the Bridegroom cometh ! ” It is when the world and the Church are alike slumbering and sleeping, and the shadows of evil are falling all around, that “ the righteousness thereof shall go forth as brightness, and the salvation thereof ” (recalling the virgins bearing their lamps in the wedding procession)—“ the salvation thereof ” as these “ blazing torches.” Oh ! when the wailing suppliant cry of a captive world, ever and anon, seems to be heard, “ Go through, go through the gates ! ” may it be ours to do what we can for the clearing away of all

stones—all moral obstructions, and thus be prepared to listen to that joyous shout here spoken of, echoing from hill to hill, and from shore to shore, “Daughter of Zion! behold thy Saviour cometh!” Not in unwatchfulness or unreadiness, may she be able to respond (may *our* voices mingle in the jubilant welcome), “Blessed is He that cometh in the name of the Lord!”

“ ‘A little while’ for patient vigil keeping,
To face the storm, to wrestle with the strong;
‘A little while’ to sow the seed with weeping,
Then bind the sheaves and sing the harvest-song.

‘A little while’ ’mid shadow and illusion,
To strive by faith Love’s mysteries to spell,
Then read each dark enigma’s clear solution,
And hail Light’s verdict, ‘He doth all things well.’

‘A little while’ the earthen pitcher taking
To wayside brooks from far-off fountains fed,
Then the parched lip its thirst for ever slaking
Beside the fulness of the Fountain-Head.

‘A little while’ to keep the oil from failing,
‘A little while’ Faith’s flickering lamp to trim;
And then the Bridegroom’s coming footstep hailing,
To haste to meet Him with the bridal hymn!”

“IN THE MULTITUDE OF MY THOUGHTS WITHIN ME
THY COMFORTS DELIGHT MY SOUL.”

"The mercies of JEHOVAH I will record ; the praises of JEHOVAH,
According to all that JEHOVAH hath done to us,
And the greatness of His goodness to the house of Israel (*Lowth*),
Which He hath shown them according to His pity and the riches
of His mercies (*Delitzsch*), [prove false.
For He said, Truly they are my people, children that will not

Verily Thou art our Father, though Abraham be ignorant of us,
And Israel will not recognise us (*Alexander*) :
Thou, Jehovah, art our Father,
O deliver us, for the sake of Thy name (*Lowth*).

Thus saith JEHOVAH,
As when (a good grape that will produce) new wine is found in a
cluster (*Barnes*),
And they say, Do not destroy it ; for a blessing is in it :
Thus will I do for the sake of my servants, not to destroy the whole.

And the plain of Sharon shall become a meadow for flocks,
And the valley of Achôr a resting-place for oxen (*Delitzsch*),
For my people who have sought me.
And I will bring forth a seed out of Jacob,
And an heir of my mountains out of Judah (*Id.*)
And my chosen ones shall inherit the land,
And my servants shall dwell there.

But ye shall rejoice and exult in the age to come which I create
(*Lowth*) :

For, lo ! I turn Jerusalem into exulting, and her people into joy.
And I shall exult over Jerusalem, and be joyous over my people ;
And the voice of weeping and screaming will be heard in her no
*more (*Delitzsch*).*

And I will impart to them a sign,
And of those that escape will I send to the Gentiles (*Barnes*),
To Tarshish, Pul, and Lud—stretchers of the bow,
To Tubal and Javan, to the distant isles,
Which have not heard my fame, nor seen my glory ;
And they shall proclaim my glory among the Gentiles."

—ISAIAH lxiii. 7—lxvi. 19.

XXX.

“Comfort ye, comfort ye my people,
saith your God.”

“But be ye glad and rejoice for ever in that which I create :
for, behold, I create Jerusalem a rejoicing, and her people
a joy. And I will rejoice in Jerusalem, and joy in my
people ; and the voice of weeping shall be no more heard
in her, nor the voice of crying.”

—ISAIAH lxxv. 18, 19.

Israel

Restored.

THE true and ultimate interpretation of these words, is unquestionably that which has been reiterated in the preceding pages, where the literal Jerusalem and her Temple are spiritualised and transfigured,—taken as types of ‘the Holy Church throughout all the world,’ purchased and consecrated by nobler and costlier than human sacrifices. The Prophet looks far beyond the restoration from captivity of his own kinsmen according to the

flesh, and the fading glories of his country's material shrine. He describes the emancipation of the true Israel of God in every age and in every land,—their entry within the gates of the spiritual Zion on earth, and their final and everlasting admission within the Heavenly Jerusalem.

And beautiful certainly, in this its highest spiritual sense, is the picture of our motto-verse: God Himself rejoicing in Jerusalem, and joying in His people! or, to use the words of one of the ablest commentators on Isaiah's prophecies, "The Church rejoicing in God, and God in the Church, so that the light of the two commingle, and each is reflected on the other" (*Delitzsch*). Religion is thus described as the only source and impartor of true happiness;—the only consolation that will dry the tears of a weeping world. Even in the midst of sadness and sorrow, it can put such words as these into a sufferer's lips—"I am filled with comfort, I am exceeding joyful in all our tribulation" (2 Cor. vii. 4).

“Rejoice in the Lord always, and again I say rejoice” (Phil. iv. 4). “The voice of weeping shall no more be heard in her, nor the voice of crying;”—a prediction fulfilled in a figurative though restricted sense, in the case of every individual who has sought and found the peace of the gospel; who, believing, rejoices “with joy unspeakable and full of glory” (1 Pet. i. 8); a prediction which will be true of the delights of millennial bliss; and, above all, which will have its grandest realisation in that Presence where there “is fulness of joy,” and at that right hand, where “there are pleasures for evermore” (Ps. xvi. 11).

We may further say, that surely if there be anything that can add zest and intensity to the believer’s own happiness, it is the wondrous assurance here given, that it is not all his own; that it is shared by the infinite heart of an infinite God. As it is expressed in a beautiful parallel passage in the prophecies of Zephaniah—“The Lord thy God in the midst of thee is mighty, He will save, He will rejoice over

thee with joy, He will rest in His love: He will joy over thee with singing" (Zeph. iii. 17). There is high festival kept within the paternal halls on the Prodigal's return; but it is the rejoicing father who forms the central figure in that picture of joy, as he clasps the wanderer in his arms, and gives him robe and ring and festive honours. "It is meet that WE should make merry and be glad" (Luke xv. 32). The shepherd of the parable lays the lost one on his shoulders *rejoicing*. The restored one may be dumb; not so the Great Restorer. The glad summons He sends round to neighbours and friends is this—"Rejoice with ME" (Luke xv. 6). May this joy of the Lord be our strength!

While attributing, however, to the words which stand at the head of this chapter, their noblest meaning, as referring to the spiritual heritage of all that fear the Lord, and to the magnificent future in store for the Church of

Christ ;—we have now reached a point in our cursory expositions of this Prophecy of Comfort, where we may profitably and appropriately pause to consider one or two of the passages, in their secondary historical application, to the nation of Israel and its promised restoration.

In the simile first used by St Jerome, we have already described Isaiah as “placed in a beacon tower,” or, still more graphically, as the same figure is expanded by a modern commentator,* standing in a divine Observatory, with prophetic telescope in his hand, surveying from an imaginary height the nations past and future. A vast range this inspired astronomer is permitted to take—from the date of his own public mission, seven centuries B.C., onwards to that Great Day, when the political firmament shall finally be “dissolved”—“When the sun shall be darkened, and the moon shall not give her light, and the stars shall fall from heaven, and the

* See Bishop Wordsworth and his extract from St Jerome in full.

powers of the heavens shall be shaken" (Matt. xxiv. 29). He had foretold the dissolution of the great world-powers of his era. He had seen Babylon, Assyria, Tyre, Ammon, Edom, Moab, Philistia, Ethiopia, Egypt—empires shining apparently like "fixed stars," which would never be expelled from their lustrous thrones—a constellation of kingdoms, each of which might have anticipated the later boast—"I sit as queen, and am no widow, and shall see no sorrow;" he had beheld all these, in vision, pass away with their phantom glories, like the mirage of the desert. Jehovah used them as his own vassal agents; instruments for the infliction of punishment on His own people, as well as on neighbouring empires; and then, when they had done their work, expunging them from the roll of nations. All his predictions were minutely verified. After he had gone to his grave, others, who had ascended his vacant "beacon tower," saw sun after sun, orb after orb going down, leaving not behind them

even the glory of their setting. So complete, in the case of some of their capitals, was the wreck and devastation, that as centuries passed away, owls might be heard screeching among the ruins, and hyenas seen roaming their 'paradises.' Words on which we have already commented were fulfilled to the letter, "Behold the nations are as a drop of a bucket, and are counted as the small dust of the balance : . . . their stock shall not take root in the earth ; and He shall also blow upon them, and they shall wither, and the whirlwind shall take them away as stubble" (xl. 15-24).

But amid this indiscriminate wreck and dissolution, there was to be *one* signal and wondrous exception. Of all the fallen capitals of the world's empires, indeed, the fall and degradation of Jerusalem was deepest and saddest. She, whose name of peerless and pre-eminent honour was "the City of God," "the City of the Great King," was to be sacked and pillaged, and her Temple, the proudest jewel in her queenly

crown, was to be destroyed. In a subsequent age, a voice more potent than that of Isaiah, declared that not one stone,—not one gem in that coronal of glory, was to be left remaining. Too true also, at this day, as in the case of all the other old-world capitals, has been the prophet's prognostication regarding her overthrow. She sits solitary ; trodden down of the Gentiles. The Jews themselves are the interpreters of her desolation ; as some of us may have seen them, in a passion of no simulated tears, kissing the hoary stones of the Tyropœan wall, or listened to the audible sobs of their broken hearts. But, if now sharing with others disintegration and decay, after a long discipline of affliction,—Jerusalem is yet to "arise and put on her beautiful garments." To employ the metaphor of a previous chapter (where Israel is represented in a state of captivity), chains, rusty with age, are yet to be taken off the paralysed limb, and the long pining prisoner is yet to go forth from her couch, "walking and leaping and praising God."

The prophetic telescope may be seen sweeping the scene of vision, and noting one nation after another passing away like falling stars or departing suns; but of her it is yet to be said, in a sense true of none other—"Thy sun shall no more go down" (lx. 20).

It would be quite beyond our limits to consider all the references made to the future of the Jewish nation which are contained even in the limited portion of Isaiah's prophecy we have been considering, far less in the chapters preceding, or the many similar vivid predictions uttered, on the same subject, by other seers.*

* Take as a specimen the independent utterances of three other prophets. *Jeremiah* says—"They shall call Jerusalem the throne of the Lord; and all the nations shall be gathered unto it, to the name of the Lord to Jerusalem. Neither shall they walk any more after the imagination of their evil heart." *Micah* says—"I will make her that halted a remnant, and her that was cast far off a strong nation. And the Lord shall reign over them in Mount Zion, from henceforth even for ever. And thou, O Tower of the flock, the stronghold of the daughter of Zion, unto thee shall it come, even the first dominion; the kingdom shall come to the daughter of Jerusalem." *Zechariah* says—"Many people and strong nations shall come to seek the

Let us only glean a few verses from the closing chapters, which have not yet been embraced in these expositions, beginning with the 63d.


These chapters may be appropriately grouped together, and viewed in connection; constituting as they do one compact and independent prophecy. They may be regarded as the winding up, or epilogue, of the entire book. As it has been well expressed—"They bring us to the threshold of all that had been promised; . . . and like as it is in finishing a musical composition, all the melodies and movements that have been struck before, are gathered up into one effective close."* They are introduced with, perhaps, the grandest example we have of what may be called Isaiah's poetic and dramatic power. No imagery could exceed the magni-

Lord of Hosts in Jerusalem, and to pray before the Lord. Thus saith the Lord, 'In those days it shall come to pass that ten men shall take hold out of all the languages of the nations, even shall take hold of the skirt of him that is a Jew, saying, We will go with you, for we have heard that God is with you.'

* *Delitzsch*, vol. ii. p. 450.

ficence of the episode contained in the first six opening verses. As he gazes from the same lofty 'beacon-tower' on Zion—looking across towards that mountain-wall of Moab and Idumea, which forms now, as then, so conspicuous a feature in the view from Jerusalem—the Prophet, suddenly seems to descry a blood-stained Warrior returning from the defiles of Edom and the palaces of Bozrah, laden with spoil. It is Messiah coming up from the slaughter of His foes—the destruction of all infidel and anti-christian powers, of which Edom was the representative. Nor must we forget, in taking, as we are now doing, the literal interpretation of these prophecies regarding the nation of Israel, that Edom formed the most cruel, implacable, and bloodthirsty enemy of the Jews: it was so from an early period in their history, until, fraternising with the Chaldeans, "the children of Edom" in the day of Jerusalem's 'calamity,' said "Rase it, rase it, even to the foundation thereof" (Ps. cxxxvii. 7). An

interview is described as taking place between the Prophet and the Divine Conqueror. The former inquires as to the person and the achievements of the mysterious Being who confronts him. And when the latter, in lengthened reply, tells of the overthrow of these Edom foes, and that "the year of His redeemed is come" (ver. 4), the seer ceases farther interrogation. The voice, which has just been addressed in anxious questioning to the august Stranger, now lapses into a strain of thanksgiving. The Pharaohs of a later age have had their chariots and their horses cast into the depths of the sea; and as the literal Israel, coming up from a second exodus, stand safe on the farther shore, the Prophet, as their representative minstrel, anticipating this great future deliverance, takes the place and the timbrel of Miriam, and sings a hymn of praise and hope in the name of his favoured posterity:—a hymn, in which he recounts the memories of God's great goodness to the Jewish nation in former ages; by adopt-



ing them as His covenant children, identifying Himself with them in their afflictions, "carrying" them and sustaining them with all the doting fondness and affection of a father:—"I will mention the loving-kindnesses of the Lord, and the praises of the Lord, according to all that the Lord hath bestowed on us, and the great goodness toward the house of Israel, which He hath bestowed on them according to His mercies, and according to the multitude of His loving-kindnesses. For He said, Surely they are my people, children that will not lie: so He was their Saviour. In all their affliction He was afflicted, and the angel of His presence saved them: in His love and in His pity He redeemed them; and He bare them, and carried them all the days of old." Bishop Lowth, who, in his valuable commentary, ever gives due prominence to the spiritual and more extended interpretation, is not unmindful, in these verses, of their primary application. He describes them as "a penitential confession and suppli-

cation of the Israelites in their present state of dispersion, in which they have so long marvelously subsisted, and still continue to subsist as a people, cast out of their country, . . . their city desolated and lost to them, and their whole nation scattered over the face of the earth, apparently deserted and cast off by the God of their fathers, as no longer His peculiar people." *

The first part of the hymn is Eucharistic; but it merges into a penitential psalm. The memory of Jehovah's great goodness is contrasted with the memory of His people's great sins. Confession is followed by importunate supplication, that the God whose "Holy Spirit" they had "vexed" (ver. 10) would "look down from heaven, and behold from the habitation of His

* Bishop Lowth's notes on Isaiah, p. 389.—"The prevalent opinion," says Dr Alexander in his commentary, "among Christian interpreters is, that we have here the beginning of a prophecy relating to the future restoration of Israel. Even Vitringa, who shows little partiality to this hypothesis in the foregoing chapters, acquiesces in it here."—Vol. ii. p. 416.

holiness and His glory." "Abraham" and "Jacob," the two pilgrim fathers of their race, might, through very shame of national apostasy, disown all relationship with their unworthy descendants; but they plead a better name and nobler pedigree (ver. 16)—"Doubtless Thou art our Father, though Abraham be ignorant of us, and Israel acknowledge us not: Thou, O Lord, art our Father, our Redeemer; Thy name is from everlasting." And taking up the wail of the Jew in every age,—*"Our adversaries have trodden down Thy sanctuary,"* this is followed by a new burst of tears,—another impassioned appeal, which ought not, as in our division of the chapters, to be abruptly terminated at the close of the 63d, but which should include, as the climax of the pleading, ver. 1 of chapter lxiv:—*"We are Thine: Thou never barest rule over them; they were not called by Thy name. Oh! that Thou wouldest rend the heavens, that Thou wouldest come down, that the mountains might flow down at Thy presence."*

. . . Be not wroth very sore, O Lord, neither remember iniquity for ever: behold, see, we beseech Thee, we are all Thy people. Thy holy cities are a wilderness, Zion is a wilderness, Jerusalem a desolation. Our holy and our beautiful house, where our fathers praised Thee, is burnt up with fire: and all our pleasant things are laid waste. Wilt Thou refrain Thyself for these things, O Lord? wilt Thou hold Thy peace, and afflict us very sore?" (lxiii. 19; lxiv. 1, 9-12).

Such are some extracts, without need of comment, from the vehement pleadings of Israel;—some of the penitential sighings of their broken spirits. Anguish, and remorse, and tears, seem as if they can go no farther. They anxiously wait for the answer from the God they have offended. This reply is contained in chapter lxv. He does not permit, indeed, light all at once to break upon their thick darkness: their sins had been so great, their ingratitude so aggravated: fore-

seeing, too, as He did, their crowning guilt, in rejecting and crucifying that Messiah whose divine Person and work had been so circumstantially unfolded to them in the 53d chapter of this very Book of Comfort, and yet who, when "He came to His OWN, His own received Him not" (John i. 11). But His reply is a gracious one. It is equivalent to a declaration of His unchanged and unchanging love, despite of all their backsliding and apostasy. He seems to say, that if He could bid welcome, as He had done, to the alien Gentile nations,—to those who "sought Him not," saying, "Behold me! behold me! unto a nation that was not called by my name" (lxv. 1);—His own people, "rebellious" though they were, might well believe with what yearning fondness He would "spread out His hands to them all the day" (these long centuries of apostasy and unbelief)—(ver. 2). The rejection was theirs, not His. Nay, more, it was only a temporary and apparent casting off, not a real and permanent

one. He, the true Joseph, might *seem* to speak harshly to His brethren, but all the while these rough tones concealed a heart of unaltered and unalterable love. Perhaps the expression in the close of the appeal, "Wilt thou refrain Thyself for these things?" had a reference to this same scene of reconciliation in the Egyptian palace, when the young Hebrew ruler, unable any longer to "refrain" himself from revealing his relationship to the stranger suppliants, allowed his long-suppressed emotions to give way, and in a burst of tears made the avowal, "I am Joseph!" The time was coming when "Messiah the Prince," the true Joseph, (in the person of the rejected Brother-man,) would reveal Himself to the very brethren who had hated and sold Him; when there would be a mutual recognition, and when, looking upon Him whom they had pierced, they would "mourn" (Zech. xii. 10).

Still further, in reply to the earnest pleadings of the Jewish people, God proceeds to

employ a new metaphor, with which, in that land of vineyards and winepresses, they were specially familiar. He speaks of the vinedresser discovering, among the damaged clusters he is casting away, one which retains some juicy grapes. These are the types of that remnant which is yet to be saved from the long-decayed and putrifying mass of the nation. These sound grapes contain the holy seed of that cherished Vine which Jehovah's own right hand is yet again to plant, as it had planted before: the hills of Palestine once more are to be covered with the shadow of it, and the boughs thereof are to be like the goodly cedars (Ps. lxxx. 10). (Chapter lxxv. 8, 9)—“Thus saith the Lord, As the new wine is found in the cluster, and one saith, Destroy it not; for a blessing is in it: so will I do for my servants' sakes, that I may not destroy them all. And I will bring forth a seed out of Jacob, and out of Judah an inheritor of my mountains; and mine elect shall inherit it, and my servants shall dwell there.” It was an

answer to the prayer of a contemporary Prophet and Psalmist whose words have just been quoted, (Ps. lxxx. 14, 15)—“Return, we beseech Thee, O God of hosts: look down from heaven, and behold, and visit this vine; and the vineyard which Thy right hand hath planted, and the branch that thou madest strong for Thyself.” The long curse which, for eighteen hundred years, has brooded over the very soil of Palestine, turning fertility into barrenness, he further says is to be removed. In our previous exposition we listened, as it were, to the sounding of the preparatory note—the preliminary blast of the herald’s trumpet, announcing Jehovah’s purpose of mercy in the return of the long-expatriated Jews to their Fatherland—“Go through, go through the gates; prepare ye the way of the people; cast up, cast up the highway, gather out the stones” (lxii. 10):—now this work of the pioneers being completed,—“the crooked places having been made straight and the rough places plain,”—

the long-exiled people, from every region of their wanderings, return to their covenanted heritage. The shepherds and vinedressers will resume the respective occupations of the olden time; the pastures once more will be clothed with flocks, and the valleys also covered over with corn. Sharon will again vindicate its title to a typical fertility in the west; and the entrance gate at the east, the gloomy gorge of Achor, associated with Israel's first trouble and chastisement, will become "a door of hope" (Hosea ii. 15). The land will become, once more, a scene of pastoral peace and plenty. Industry and wealth will supplant indolence and crime, desolation and wretchedness, (ver. 10)—"And Sharon shall be a fold of flocks, and the valley of Achor a place for the herds to lie down in, for my people that have sought me." Or, as the same picture is similarly portrayed in a previous chapter (lxi. 4, 5)—"And they shall build the old wastes, they shall raise up the former desolations, and they shall repair the waste cities, the desolations

of many generations. And strangers shall stand and feed your flocks, and the sons of the alien shall be your plowmen and your vine-dressers." And then the same Divine Promiser who, in ver. 16, calls Himself by the name "the God of Truth" (or, as that rather means literally, "the God of Amen" (*Delitzsch*), the God who pledges and guarantees His word for all that He has spoken) utters the beautiful declaration which stands at the head of this chapter, (vers. 18, 19)—"But be ye glad and rejoice for ever in that which I create: for, behold, I create Jerusalem a rejoicing, and her people a joy. And I will rejoice in Jerusalem, and joy in my people; and the voice of weeping shall be no more heard in her, nor the voice of crying." That word, "nor the voice of crying," has been rendered by one commentator by the strong epithet "screaming;" by *Bishop Lowth*—"A distressful cry." May there not be here a contrasted reference to those loud 'screamings' and 'distressful cries' which

have again and again risen from these eighteen times 'besieged walls?' Be this as it may, that "crying" is to be no more heard in her. Jerusalem becomes, as the name implies, "the vision of peace." The vision is turned into a reality. These wails of horror and despair, which are spoken of in her last great siege, by Josephus, as waking the echoes of her adjacent hills and valleys, are never again to break upon the ear: her God has uttered the benediction, "Peace be within thy walls." Thus then will Jerusalem, her sister cities, and the whole Land of Promise, so long doomed and degraded by their sins, and which might righteously have had the curse-mark of disinheritance set on them for ever, become to "the nations of the saved," of which they will form the glorious and glorified centre, the grandest of all comments on the Apostle's words, "Where sin abounded grace did much more abound" (Rom. v. 20). Nay, farther, if we accept the literal interpretation of one of the closing utterances in this Manual of Comfort in

its connection with other parallel prophecies, are we not warranted in entertaining the belief that these restored and christianised children of Abraham will yet become the great Apostles and Missionaries of the world? From Jerusalem, the metropolis and mother-city of future Christendom, they are to go forth as bearers of the glad tidings once sung on the plains of their own Bethlehem—"And I will send those that escape of them unto the nations, to Tarshish, Pul, and Lud, that draw the bow, to Tubal and Javan, to the isles afar off, that have not heard my fame, neither have seen my glory; and they shall declare my glory among the Gentiles. And they shall bring all your brethren for an offering unto the Lord, out of all nations, upon horses, and in chariots, and in litters, and upon mules, and upon swift beasts, to my holy mountain Jerusalem, saith the Lord, as the children of Israel bring an offering in a clean vessel into the house of the Lord" (lxvi. 19, 20). The "Evangelistess Zion" of the fortieth chapter,

will thus say, not to "the cities of Judah" only, but to the cities and kingdoms of the world, "Behold your God." What God? Who other than "the God of Amen,"—He who will then be owned, and rejoiced in, by those who so long disowned Him, as "the Amen, the Faithful and True Witness" (Rev. ii. 14); and in whom all the promises of God "are Yea, and in Him Amen" (2 Cor i. 20).

"Glorious things" (future as well as past) "are spoken of thee, O City of God!" (Ps. lxxxvii. 3). May the Churches of Christ—even in the midst, it may be, of present discouragement and trial—be stimulated in their mission and responsibilities towards "the lost sheep of the house of Israel," and so enjoy the blessing promised in one of these chapters to all who love God's ancient people—who seek to "build the old waste places, and to raise up the foundations of many generations"—"Thou shalt be called the Repairer of the breach, the Restorer of paths to dwell in" (lviii. 12).

Let us close, by rehearsing the Prophet's adjuration and prayer, along with the sublime corresponding answer. Both of these have already been considered in reference to the figurative and spiritual Jerusalem; but they will bear repetition in their literal application to the dispersed tribes of Israel. *Israel's prayer*, "Awake, awake, put on strength, O arm of the Lord; awake, as in the ancient days, the generations of old" (li. 9). *Jehovah's answer*—(Isa. lxii. 1-7)—"For Zion's sake will I not hold my peace, and for Jerusalem's sake I will not rest, until the righteousness thereof go forth as brightness, and the salvation thereof as a lamp that burneth. And the Gentiles shall see thy righteousness, and all kings thy glory: and thou shalt be called by a new name, which the mouth of the Lord shall name. Thou shalt also be a crown of glory in the hand of the Lord, and a royal diadem in the hand of thy God. Thou shalt no more be termed Forsaken; neither shall thy land any more be termed

Desolate : but thou shalt be called Hephzi-bah, and thy land Beulah : for the Lord delighteth in thee, and thy land shall be married. For as a young man marrieth a virgin, so shall thy sons marry thee : and as the bridegroom rejoiceth over the bride, so shall thy God rejoice over thee. I have set watchmen upon thy walls, O Jerusalem, which shall never hold their peace day nor night : ye that make mention of the Lord, keep not silence ; and give Him no rest, till He establish, and till He make Jerusalem a praise in the earth." All the preceding prophecies of Isaiah—his predictions regarding the world's kingdoms, as well as regarding the humiliation and sufferings of Messiah—have been wondrously, we may say circumstantially, fulfilled. May we not take this as a pledge and assurance that His delineations of Israel's future, and of the conspicuous part 'Jerusalem restored' is yet to act in the drama of the latter days, will also with equal fidelity be realised and accomplished? The Jewish people—"the

people without a home, almost without a grave"—have been poetically described as "the Niobe of Nations." Not by the Tigris and Euphrates only, but by every stream and river in either hemisphere, has afflicted Zion hung her harp on the willows of sadness and despair;—her tongue cleaving to the roof of her mouth, as she attempts to sing the Lord's song in these strange lands. But the long-deferred hour of jubilee is certain: "Though ye have lien among the pots, yet shall ye be as the wings of a dove covered with silver and her feathers with yellow gold" (Ps. lxxviii. 13). "All Israel shall be saved;"—"the mouth of the Lord hath spoken it." A voice, like an Angel's whisper, (no, it is diviner;—it is the Spirit of the living God coming from the four winds and breathing on the slain); ere long, it *may* be,—sooner or later it *must* be,—that voice will be heard, like a rustling among the willow-leaves, waking harp and soul in unison to the strain,—"**COMFORT YE, COMFORT YE MY PEOPLE.**"

Tell me, O thou captive daughter,
Why this sackcloth on thy brow?
Why thy children given to slaughter,
Made in servitude to bow?

Heaven proclaims the awful story:
"She has slain the Lord of Glory!"

She who once in peerless splendour
'Mid the kingdoms sat enthroned,
Alien now, without defender,
Scorned, rejected, and disowned!
Nations! read the thrilling story,
Lest ye scorn the Lord of Glory!

Zion! shall there then be spoken
"Glorious things" of thee no more?
Does thy God thy ramparts broken
Still forbid thee to restore?
Go and wail with tears the story,
How ye *slew* the Lord of Glory!

Lord! make bare Thine arm to save her;
Let her exiles cease to roam;
Let the promised time to favour,
Yea, the set time, let it come!
Heralds! spread the joyful story,
Judah *owns* the Lord of Glory!

Rise! ye prostrate sons of Salem;
God once more is on your side.
Weeping aliens! come and hail Him
Whom your fathers crucified.
Teach a wondering world the story
How ye *love* the Lord of Glory!

"IN THE MULTITUDE OF MY THOUGHTS WITHIN ME
THY COMFORTS DELIGHT MY SOUL."

*"As a man whom his mother comforteth (Alexander and
Umbreit),*

So will I comfort you ;

And in Jerusalem shall ye be comforted."

—ISAIAH lxvi. 13.

XXXI.

“Comfort ye, comfort ye my people,
saith your God.”

“As one whom his mother comforteth, so will I comfort you.”

—ISAIAH lxvi. 13.

The Closing THESE words form part of the Word of closing chapter in this Second Book Comfort. of Isaiah's great prophecy, and may be taken as an appropriate conclusion to our present series of meditations. As he began, so does he end with *comfort*. This Old Testament Barnabas—this “Son of consolation,” sums up his exalted solaces by giving the *measure* of comfort. This he does by an emblem or image, already brought touchingly before us in a kindred passage (chap. xlix. 15),—an emblem which comes home to the heart of universal

humanity—"As one whom his mother comforteth, so will I comfort you."

Maternal love and tenderness (to dwell for a little with greater amplitude on the figure then cursorily referred to) is the strongest and most enduring of instincts. It holds potent sway even in the brute creation, and among the lower tribes of animated being. We see it exemplified in the timid bird hovering with wailing cry over the threatened or despoiled nest, and, despite of its feebleness and weakness, ready to give battle to the invader. We see it in the familiar scriptural emblem of the hen gathering her brood of chickens under her wings in threatening storm, or in the hour of danger. We see it in the bolder watch the mother of the eaglets keeps over her young in the eyry on cliff or mountain-side, as she disputes, with ruffled plumage, the assault of the plunderer. We see it in the proverbial fierceness of the "bear robbed of her whelps," or in the maddened roar of the lioness bereaved of her cubs,

as she lashes her sides with her tail, and makes mountain and forest "ring with the proclamation of her wrongs."

But it is the mother and her infant babe (the human parent) in whom this deep-seated instinct has its highest, truest illustration. Who can love, who can comfort, like a mother? Perhaps, too, the most striking and most beautiful exemplification of that comfort is, not where cradles are rocked in lordly halls or under gilded ceilings (though the crowned and queenly mother can also hold her vigils of devotion at the sick-couch of her child); but the strength of the God-given affection is best attested in the case of those, who, from bitter penury and dire misfortune (it may be crime), are dead to other nobler and finer feelings and aspirations. The shivering beggar in her rags, asking a pittance from door to door, has her warmest covering reserved for the little sufferer she presses to her bosom, and interludes her own cheerless alm-song with some tender

lullaby of love and comfort addressed to the tiny burden that is dearer to her than her own life. And as maternal tenderness belongs to no rank or class, so neither does it belong to any age. The Hebrew mother of the olden time and the British mother, of the present, share the same solicitude for their offspring. You may recall one among other Old Testament examples.—A little child in a harvest-field of Northern Palestine, as he gambolled among the reapers, was smitten all in a moment by a sunstroke. The cry of distress is first uttered in his father's ear,—“My head! my head!” “Carry him to his mother,” was the instant direction. Then follows the tender delineation when that injunction is obeyed;—we see him seated on his mother's knee, fondled and caressed during hours of anxious suspense, till at last he drooped, a withered flower, on her bosom (2 Kings iv. 18–20). Aye, and doubtless in her case, as in thousand thousand similar since her sad day of blighted hopes, the

depths of a mother's affection, was only gauged when the cradle was emptied,—the face despoiled of its dimples, and the ringing laugh silenced. A mother's love! a mother's comforts! Who cannot tell of them? Were I to describe the experiences of all whose eyes trace these lines, what a picture-gallery would be formed! Go back to your earliest dreams of infancy in the day-dawn of memory; you can almost recall touch for touch in the portrait of that Shunamite we have just described; when the little sick-couch was anxiously watched and night-rest willingly surrendered, for days, it may be weeks, together, in order that no hand but her own might moisten the fevered lips, bathe the throbbing temples, and smooth the pillow. Or that dark night when the winds were wrestling outside with the branches, as if the spirits of the air had broken loose in wild carnival; or when the thunderstorm was lowering over the blackened heavens; what was it that dispelled your infant fears and exorcised

the demons of the storm? What but the comforting tones of a mother's voice, and the firm grasp of a mother's hand. Or a stage more advanced: when infancy and childhood were merging into youth—when, a young learner at school, you were weeping despairingly over the hard unmastered task, you remember how the words of heart-cheer from a mother's lips chased these tears away, or lulled you soothingly to sleep, in happy forgetfulness of your mental troubles and disquietude. Or more memorable still: you may recall the incipient fault, the fit of passion, the petty misappropriation, the departure from the truth, the artful concealment: then the discovery, and the bitter anguish of the young and sensitive conscience. But you remember, too, *whose* words, first of wise reproof and then of generous forgiveness, brought back the sunshine to life's young morning; *who* "kissed the offence into everlasting forgetfulness." Or a stage yet further still: when you first set out from under the parental roof-tree on

that never-to-be-forgotten journey into the cold, ungenial world ; that morning when you were first to leave the old happy homestead, when the trance of early life was to be broken, and the varied members of the loved circle were grouped around the door to take the parting adieu ;—you remember whose words fell deepest on your soul,—whose lips left the most lasting impress on your cheek,—whose image followed you most constantly in your new abode. Ay ! and when away in that distant land or that remote city, amid new scenes and new trials, new associations and new temptations, lonely and friendless, all strange around you,—the voices of the past hushed in silence ; you recall whose form rose brightest before you as you knelt at your first evening prayer ? Or when the first letter in the far-off country was received with the well-known handwriting, you remember how, as you laid it down, and the big tear dropped unbidden on its closing lines, you uttered in silence the words, “ *As one whom his*

mother comforteth!" Or, once more: when childhood and youth had long passed away—when in full-grown manhood some wave of calamity had swept over you;—when some awful family sorrow had wrung your heart with anguish, and spread an eclipse over earth's brightest sunshine; other friends came with their well-meant sympathy to cheer your darkened chamber and smitten heart; but their words fell cheerless and discordant on your spirit,—the patriarch's verdict was that of your own inmost soul, "Miserable comforters are ye all;" you remember well, what was the one ray of solace that pierced that thick darkness—the one voice of comfort that alone had a right to speak—a right to intrude. But it stole in, like a descant of sweetest music. It was the voice that of old lulled your infant fears and hushed your infant sorrows. The ministering angel of the cradle, is once more seated the ministering angel in the chamber of bereavement, and vindicates the deathless influence and death-

less spell of a mother's tender comfort! I might add, if possible, a sadder experience still. When the happy and salutary restraints of the parental home had been long forgotten;—when temptation had thrown around you its accursed snares, and in the mad fever of your passions, bursting every other sacred bond, you had plunged into prodigal excess and godless riot,—the mother's pleading voice was alone heard amid the wild surges of the storm! The vessel was plunging fiercely amid the thick darkness; but when no other anchor could hold it, that poor drifting human heart was moored by a *mother's love!*

And this brings us to what we cannot help regarding as the true interpretation, and as revealing the force and beauty of the words at the head of this chapter. Our English translation alters and dilutes the original,—“As one whom his mother comforteth,” is the rendering in our version. It would be better and more faithful —“As A MAN whom his mother comforteth.”

Our translators, apparently feeling the incongruity of a mother comforting a full-grown man, have sought to give the impression rather of the natural picture we have been dwelling upon—the mother bending over her child, soothing the pains and griefs of helpless infancy; and doubtless this may well be included. But a German commentator* gives what we believe to be the correct paraphrase and meaning, when he renders it, “As a mother, who, as no other can, soothes the ruffled spirit of a *man*, so will I comfort you.” That meaning is in beautiful harmony with not a few incidents in Old Testament story. Isaac, in the prime of manhood, was said to be “comforted after his mother’s death,” implying what a comfort she had proved to him during life, and how saddened he had been by her removal (Gen. xxiv. 67). Or, to take one other example: we have a picture in the brightest part of Solomon’s man-

* *Umbreit*

hood (he who describes himself as "tender and only beloved in the sight of his mother")—as to his grateful appreciation of that early love, and his hallowed memories of its comforts and consolations (1 Kings ii. 19, 20).^{*} Some may be able, from their own experience, or from their remembrance of others, to endorse the power and truthfulness of the figure of our text. A striking instance rises before my own mind in the case of a family of my own congregation, several years ago, all of whose members have now been gathered to their long home. It was that of a son, who had attained more than the full strength and glory of manhood, and who had been stricken down by appalling accident in a distant foreign land. There, amid his hours of severe bodily pain and prostration, he had but

^{*} See these references, with other observations given on this rendering, in Dr Alexander's Commentary. "The English version," says he, "which in multitudes of cases inserts *man* where the original expression is indefinite (translating *οὐδεὶς* for example, always *no man*), here reverses the process, and dilutes 'a *man*' to '*one*.'"—P. 468, vol. ii.

one thought, one constant earthly prayer—
 "Take me to my mother!" The wish was
 granted. Despite of the torture entailed by
 locomotion, and the exhaustion and peril of
 tedious weeks of travel, he reached the old
 home. In the wild wanderings of fever and
 weakness he could recognise, and no more
 (through gleams of returning consciousness), the
 form and accents he had wearily longed for.
 As the object of all that filial solicitude, in calm
 but fearful emotion bent over the haggard
 countenance till her hands closed the drooping
 eyelids. It was nature's own photograph and
 attestation to the truth of the Prophet's words,
 "He is grown-up man whom his mother com-
 forted." Can I not take a holier illustration
 still? There was ONE who once walked this
 earth, who was ~~were~~ that man: but who also
 had His later experience of sorrow, and pain,
 and anguish. He too, knew the power of a
 mother's love, and the soothing tenderness of a
 mother's consolations as He pursued His toil-

worn path,—sorrow, in every diversified shape and form, tracking His steps. Doubtless the remembrances of Bethlehem and Nazareth were all interweaved with those of that loving parent. And when the last awful experience came,—when, stretched on a cross of shame and agony, He looked down on the crowd surging beneath, His eye rested on the well-known object of filial affection, His dying words singled out that ONE ; and the holy trust was bequeathed to His most trusted disciple, “ Son ! behold thy *mother*.” Her very presence there, had sent a ray of sunshine to His soul in the thick darkness, “ *as a MAN whom His mother comforteth !* ”

‘ Such,’ says God (as we found Him saying in that parallel passage where the same image is employed), ‘ Such, O believer, is the measure of My “ comfort ” imparted to thee ! Take these pictures one by one ; pace round this picture-gallery, these corridors with their cartoons, all illustrative of an earthly mother’s love, and

write under each one of them, "So will I comfort thee!" I am all *that*, and more, to thee! Amid all the sorrows of life, amid its hard lessons and toilsome tasks, amid its hours of loneliness and solitude, I will be near to lay my hands upon thee, and to say, "Fear not." Ay, more, after all these varied and diversified picturings of a mother's affection, this Divine Comforter turns round and says, "They may forget." There is a possibility, even in the case of a mother, of betraying the deepest and holiest instincts of her nature. These instincts may become indurated by crime or blunted by misfortune—"They may forget." Nay, they *have* forgotten! The world-wide story of the mother in sacked Jerusalem, under the rage of famine, proclaims how even the unquenchable fire of earthly maternal love *may* be quenched in nameless horrors—"They may forget. YET," He adds, "will not I forget thee!" There is a strange Arabian legend regarding the jewelled staff of Solomon, composed though it was of wood

of the finest and strongest texture (the very type of durability), that a worm, unseen, gnawed inside, till at last it broke in twain. So may the words of the Prophet be uttered over the most sacred symbol of earthly love—"How is the staff broken and the beautiful rod!" But no such words can be employed over the staff of comfort God puts into His people's hands—"Yet will I not forget thee:"—"I will never leave thee, I will never" (or, as that is emphasized in the original, "I will *never, never, never*") "forsake thee!" The best of earthly mothers *must* leave, and in a sad earthly sense *must* sooner or later 'forsake;' the hand that fondled and caressed and comforted in infancy and youth and manhood, must some day be mouldering in the dust—yet will I not forget nor forsake thee!

And specially are these words of our text comforting and consoling to the afflicted and bereaved. *Who*, of all her family, does the mother on earth most love and tenderly care

for? Is it not her sick and suffering child? The strong shrubs are left to grapple with the storm: it is the weak and fragile ones she specially tends, and props, and shelters from biting frost or scorching sun. The ninety and nine are left by the shepherd to roam at will, untended on the mountain-side; but the *one* footsore fleecetorn wanderer—the one sick or wounded, he grudges no length of journey to succour, or to bear back on his shoulder rejoicing to the fold. Sorrowing one! It is *on you* this great God lavishes His deepest, profoundest sympathy. You are the battered flower He loves most to tend. You are the drooping member of the flock whose wounds He loves most to bind up. It is by the cradle of some great life-sorrow He loves to sit, weaving, as a tender mother, His strains of love and comfort!

And *such* a Prop! such a Sustainer! We are strengthened on earth by the consciousness of having some superior mind to minister to our

sorrows. The stronger the arm and the wiser the heart, the greater do we feel the sustaining power of the offered sympathy. *What must be the support and consolation of an Infinite God!* Perfect power and Perfect wisdom not only giving the cup, but holding our hands while we drink it!

Be cheered, then, with this closing thought, that He who is better, fonder, truer than the best and fondest of parents, "covers your head in the day of battle:"—"God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble" (Ps. xlv. 1). Yes, and at the close of all, when life's varying, changeful (often hard) conflict has been fought; or rather, when the fatal arrow has sped at last from the unerring bowman, and the pulses are fast ebbing;—He will seat Himself there also, to close, with a mother's fond affection, your eyes in their death-slumber—"So He giveth His beloved sleep;" and the last words, falling like a tranquil *requiem* on your dulled ear, will be these—"COMFORT YE, COMFORT YE MY PEOPLE, SAITH YOUR GOD!"

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'COMFORT YE, COMFORT YE,' thus saith thy God to thee,—
Comfort my people, and 'speak to their heart' (xl. 1, 2);
Though the hills may be shaken, the mountains removed be,
Love such as mine cannot change or depart (liv. 10).

'COMFORT YE, COMFORT YE,' lift up your eyes and see
Who hath created these star-hosts so bright;
Each name of the glittering phalanx is called by me;
Marshaled their ranks by the word of my might (xl. 26).

Why, then, O Israel, thus faithless and craven be,
Doubting my power, and distrusting my care? (xl. 27).
On the palms of my hands, I have, Zion, engraven thee;
Nothing can ever efface thee from there (xlix. 16).

'COMFORT YE, COMFORT YE,' mothers untrue may be,
Instincts, most sacred, may wither and die (xlix. 15),
Or the tongue, by thy cradle which sang its fond lullaby,
Silent in death's gloomy regions may lie;—

But ne'er shall my requiem, 'COMFORT YE, COMFORT YE,'
Cease to resound o'er the death-stricken heart,
Or fail in its mission with those who in sorrow be,
Peace, consolation, and joy to impart (xlix. 15; lvii. 18, 19).

'COMFORT YE, COMFORT YE,' tell forth that none can be
Left uninvited the blessing to share (lv. 1);
For a welcome is waiting to all who repair to me—
Rest in my love, and a home in my care.

'COMFORT YE, COMFORT YE,' wide let the message flee,
Say unto Zion, 'Thy God on high reigns' (lii. 7),
Proclaim to all nations, 'Messiah has come to free
Captives from prison and bondsmen from chains' (xlii. 7; lxi. 1).

'COMFORT YE, COMFORT YE,' soon shall these words to thee
(Words for the weeping) be needed no more:
Soon from earth's willow-tree taken thy harp shall be—
Taken and tuned for the joys evermore! (lxv. 18, 19).

**"Break forth into Joy,
Sing together,
Ye waste places of Jerusalem:
for
The Lord
hath comforted His people."**

(ISAIAH lii. 9.)

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